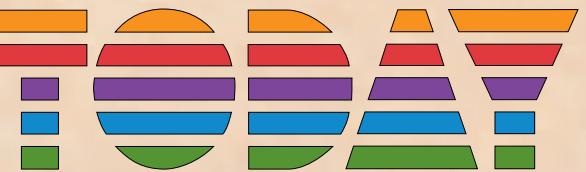


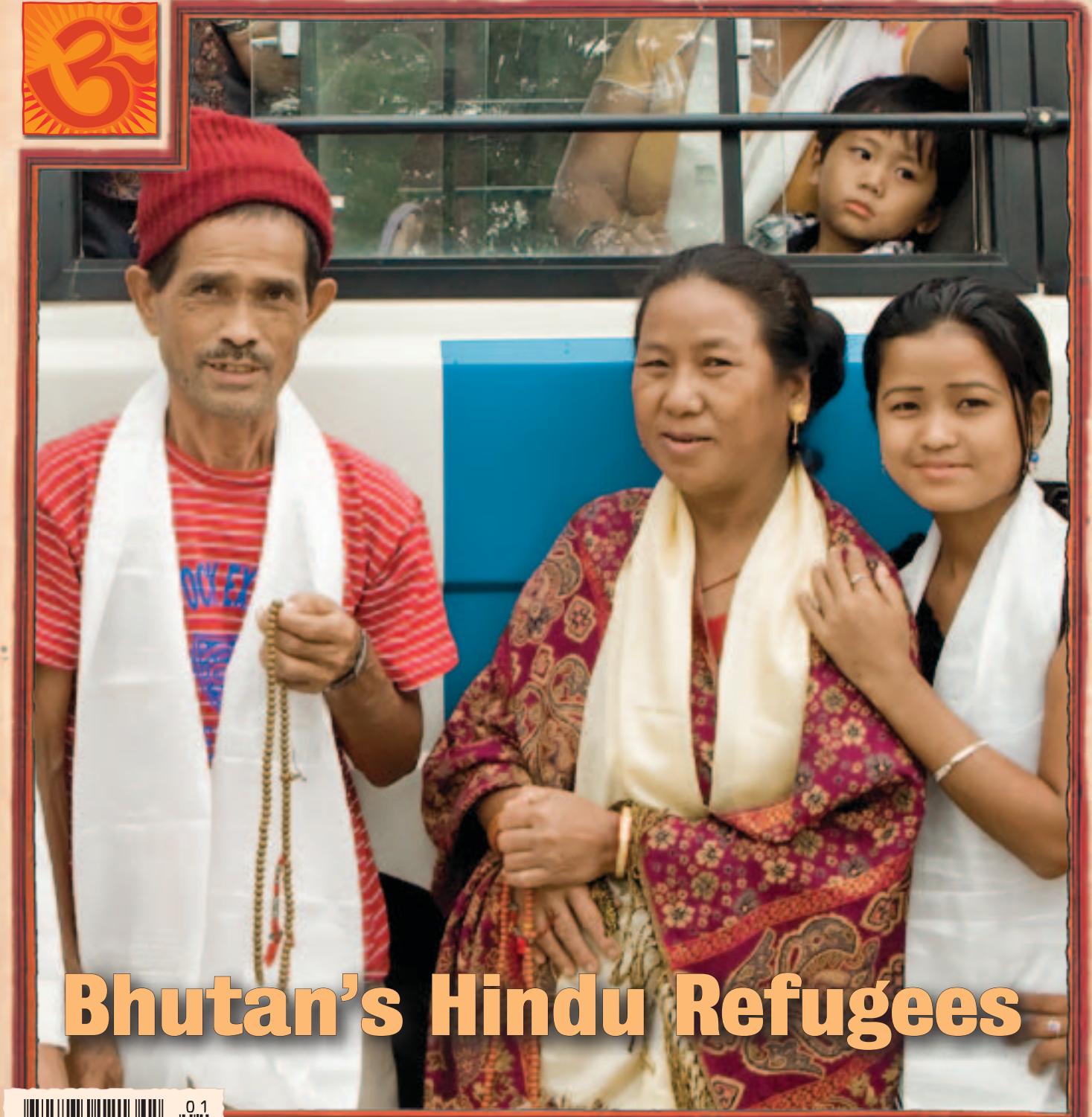
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January/February/March, 2010

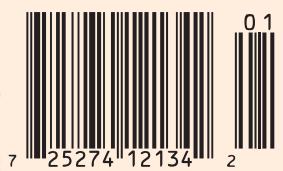
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Affirming Sanatana Dharma and Recording the Modern History of a Billion-Strong Global Religion in Renaissance



## Bhutan's Hindu Refugees



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Singapore . . . . SGD 10

Trinidad . . . . TTD 48  
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THOMAS KELLY



COVER: Bhutanese Hindus in Kathmandu about to depart for the US. Our story tells of squandered decades in refugee camps and a people's flight to freedom, hope and new challenges in the West. Above: dancer Ruth St. Denis plays Radha in an opulent 1915 production.

JANUARY/FEBRUARY/MARCH, 2010 • HINDU YEAR 5111  
VIRODHIN, THE YEAR OF ADVERSITIES

*Boopathi Venkateswara*

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# Welcome TO HINDUISM TODAY'S DIGITAL EDITION!

I am pleased to welcome you to the free digital edition of Hinduism Today magazine. It is the fulfillment of a vision held by my Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, founder of Hinduism Today, to bring the magazine's profound Hindu teachings to the widest possible audience. The text of each issue has long been available on the Web, right back to 1979, but without the photographs and art. Now you have here the entire contents of the printed edition, with all photos and art. Plus, it is interactive—every link is live; click and you go to a web page. You can participate in the magazine in a number of ways, accessed through buttons on the right. And you can help support this free edition in two ways: make an online contribution (even a small one); patronize our specialized advertisers. Explore the resources here, enjoy our latest edition and e-mail us if you are inspired.

*Bodhinatha Veylanswami*

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FROM **BHUTAN**

TO **AMERICA**



Pushed out of their Bhutanese homeland 19 years ago, nearly all of the 106,000 refugees living in camps like this one in Nepal are to be resettled in the West. Most are coming to the US... page 18



# GLOBAL DHARMA

NEPAL

## Pashupatinath Tensions

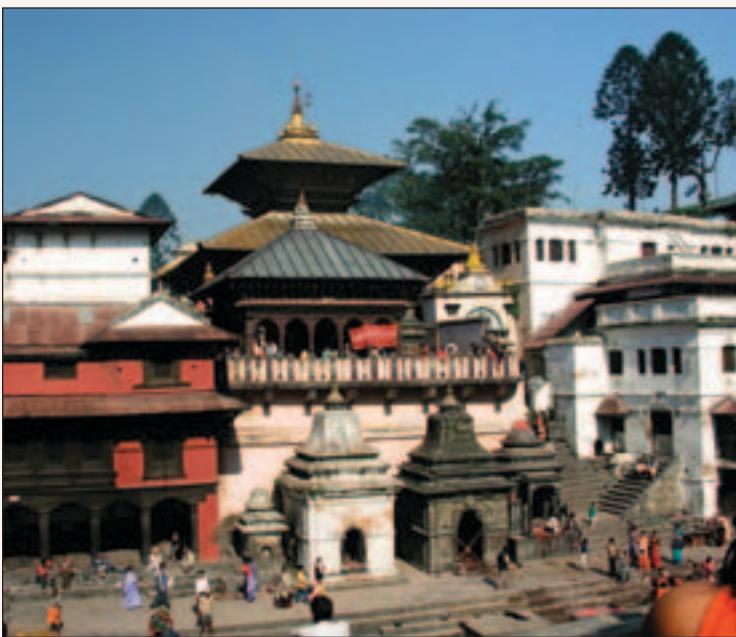
**R**ANCOROUS FIGHTING OVER WHO should be the priests of Nepal's famed Pashupatinath temple continued through the fall of 2009. In late 2008, the Maoist government had bowed under protest from Nepal's orthodox Hindus to remove the chief priest of the temple, Bishnu Dahal, a Nepali. Priests from the South Indian states of Kerala, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu were reinstated.

After the fall of the Maoist government in the spring of 2009, in August the Pashupatinath Area Development Trust (PAPT) took the opportunity to increase the number of Indian priests by contacting four Indian peeths—sacred monasteries—in Karnataka, Orissa, Gujarat and Uttarakhand. The monasteries were to shortlist suitable candidates, who would be screened and interviewed by

PAPT, to help the temple during occasional illness or absences. This time, it was the Maoist camp that protested.

In September a group of 40–50 Maoists assaulted five newly-arrived Indian priests and made their demands again to overturn the 800-year-old tradition of having Indians be the main temple priests. The disruption forced closure of the temple for two days.

India's Ambassador to Nepal lodged a strong protest with the Home Minister. He demanded and got more security for the five Indian priests. The temple was reopened. However, security guards checked each and every devotee to prevent any Maoist infiltration.



**Siva's pujaris under duress:** Nepal's most holy sanctuary has become the center of a struggle over the national identity of its priests

mounting pressure, the Maoists removed the padlocks and by the end of the month the flow of tourists and devotees nearly returned to normal. Only time will tell if the uneasy truce will keep Lord Siva's priests from further harassment.

The Maoists had also padlocked the temple offices. Tourist fees could not be collected and the PAPT suffered a daily loss of US\$6,500 for two weeks. More than 600 tourists a day visit the area and each tourist is charged an entrance fee of Rs. 500. Under



**Standing in water while performing japa is considered the best defense against the reputed future ill influences of a solar eclipse**

INDIA

## Tuning In to Cosmic Forces

**D**URING THE AUGUST 1, 2009, solar eclipse many Hindus immersed themselves in rivers, and performed japa and homa with the goal to avert its negative influence. On the other hand Chandramauli Upadhyaya,

a trustee of Kashi Vishwanath Temple, said Indian astrology actually doesn't say that eclipse has a direct bad influence on people. Still, it is well known that devotional practice at such times of intensity yield great results.

**Standing in water while performing japa is considered the best defense against the reputed future ill influences of a solar eclipse**

Indian American (search "Christian girls try to convert Hindu girl") was sad, hilarious and encouraging all at once.

It was sad to see the utter depth of ignorance on the part of the young Christian girls about anything related to Hinduism or India. One girl could not even place India on the world map, inviting a rain of derisive on-line comments. It was hilarious because the comments by the Christian girls were mind-boggling to the point of being ludicrous, leading some to believe it was a spoof. It was encouraging because the young Hindu girl, Saraswati, stood her ground with articulate intelligence. She was a microcosm of Hinduism's historical endurance in the face of narrow ideologies.



## Failed Attempt at Conversion

**T**HE YOUTUBE VIDEO BY TWO American girls attempting to convert a young



USA

## Anju Bhargava On Obama's Committee

**I**N APRIL, 2009, ANJU BHARGAVA became the second Indian American and first Hindu to be appointed to Obama's Faith Based and Community Partnerships Council. Bhargava came from Chennai when she

was nineteen and has lived in the US ever since. She is the president of Asian Indian Women in America.

In an interview with the *Express* in Chennai, she said the Council is more about social initiatives than spiritual process. She will work for knowledge sharing and community service development among Americans of Indian origin. She plans to see that service initiatives such as the Hindu American Seva Charities, ([HinduAmericanSeva.org](http://HinduAmericanSeva.org)) which she convened, receive the same funding as Christian organizations. "The churches have evolved as huge service organizations due to the support they receive from the government. We are seeking such a support, too." Bhargava is an ordained Hindu priest and works to instill dharmic values and the inner meaning of practices into the new generation of Hindu Americans.

## ARCHEOLOGY / LINGUISTICS Computers Call it Language!

diverse content, both of which are suggestive of a linguistic writing system rather than a nonlinguistic symbol system."



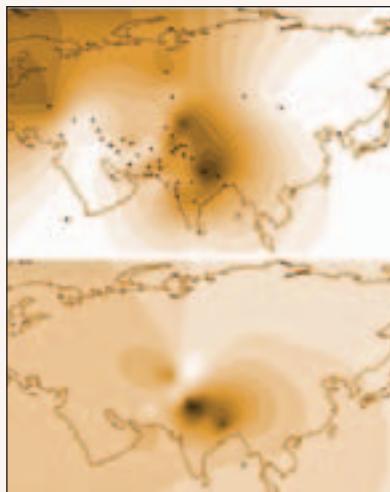
**Scientists struggle to decipher the mysterious 4,000-year-old Indus script**

GENETIC ORIGINS

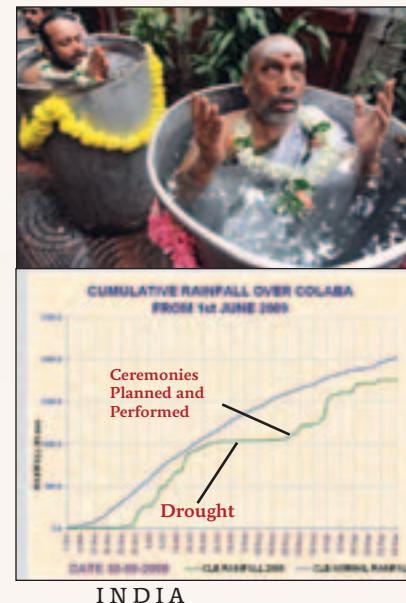
## Brahmins, Tribals, All Castes Originated in India

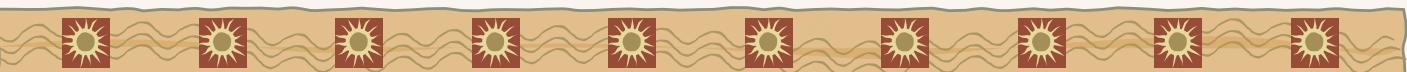
**I**N JANUARY, 2009, THE JOURNAL *Human Genetics* published an Indian genetic researchers' report titled, "The Indian Origin of Paternal Haplotype R1a1 Substantiates the Autochthonous Origins of Brahmins and the Caste System." This report is sending tremors across academia, as it may deal a final and definitive blow to the Aryan Invasion theory. The highly technical, original report is available here: <http://www.nature.com/jhg/> search "brahmins caste."

In summary: 1) If Central Asians invaded India to form the high castes, you would expect that brahmins have many Central Asian genes. They do not. 2) R1a1 genes associated with high caste brahmins are highly concentrated in India but sparse in Central Asians. 3) Brahmins, scheduled castes and tribals all show a common genetic ancestry. 4) The age of this yet to be determined common parentage



**Graphic distribution of the R1a genetic markers with high density in India may indicate Central Asians came from India**





## WE ARE ALL HINDUS NOW

BY LISA MILLER

America is not a Christian nation. We are, it is true, a nation founded by Christians, and according to a 2008

way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the father except through me."

Americans are no longer buying it. According to a 2008 Pew Forum survey,

ally believe that bodies and souls are sacred, that together they comprise the "self," and that at the end of time they will be reunited in the Resurrec-

less like traditional Christians in the ways we think about God, our selves, each other and eternity.

"The *Rig Veda* says this: 'Truth is One, but the sages speak of it by many names.' A Hindu believes there are many paths to God. The most traditional, conservative Christians have not been taught to think like this. They learn in Sunday school that their religion is true, and others are false."

Hindus, of course, were gratified to see their philosophy touted at the top of the US mainstream media.

have two guards permanently posted to prevent vandalism. The Chams were Saivite Hindus who flourished as early as the eighth century. Most Chams converted to Islam, but 15%–20% of present-day Cham people still practice Hinduism.

Hindus who were protesting against Dalits' entering a Hindu temple. The Dalits, described as low-caste untouchables, tried to enter several temples as part of their campaign to protest being barred from temple entry. Such discrimination is against the law in India but still practiced.

**AN ANCIENT VIETNAMESE HINDU**  
Cham society sanctuary at Hue, Vietnam, was given a US\$32,000 grant for "protection works" in September, 2009. The site will

NEW YORK

## Radical Western Belief Shift

**I**N AUGUST, 2009, NEWSWEEK published an article by Lisa Miller titled, "We Are All Hindus Now." What was remarkable was the editorial spin Ms. Miller brought to the piece. The article used a picture of many statues of Lord Ganesha and boldly declared the following:

"America is not a Christian nation. We are, it is true, a nation

founded by Christians, and according to a 2008 survey, 76 percent of us continue to identify as Christian—the lowest percentage in American history. Two million Hindus live in the United States, a fraction of the billion who live on Earth. But recent poll data show that conceptually, at least, we are slowly becoming more like Hindus and

"Americans are no longer

## BRIEFLY...

**MONSOON RAINS DAMAGED 450-** year old Vaishnava manuscripts at the Sri Madhvacharya Mutt in Manralayam, Andra Pradesh, last October. Library rooms were filled with mud and water and it is feared some manuscripts will be lost forever. The incident highlights the urgency to digitize India's literary heritage.

**IN OCTOBER, 2009, POLICE IN** Tamil Nadu police had to shoot in the air to disperse a stone-throwing crowd of higher caste

Newsweek's article ties Hinduism to changing American values

buying it. According to a 2008 Pew Forum survey, 65 percent of us believe that "many religions can lead to eternal life"—including 37 percent of white evangelicals, the group most likely to believe that salvation is theirs alone."

She also noted changing attitudes about life after death—more Americans are opting for cremation, which indicates they do not believe in the resurrection of the body at some time in the future. And, twenty-four percent of Americans are now willing to say that they believe in reincarnation.

Ms. Miller cited Stephen Prothero, religion professor at Boston University, who has long framed the American propensity for "the divine-delicafeteria religion" as "very much in the spirit of Hinduism. You're not picking and choosing from different religions because they're all the same," he says. "It isn't about orthodoxy. It's about whatever works. If going to yoga works, great—and if going to Catholic mass works, great. And if going to Catholic mass plus the yoga plus the Buddhist retreat works, that's great, too."

Hindus, of course, were gratified to see their philosophy touted at the top of the US mainstream media.

evidence that the Harappan civilization had a presence in the region and that the history of Kerala can be traced back beyond the Iron Age," historian M. R. Raghava Varier said.

**IN HOPES OF RESOLVING TENSION** in Malaysia that resulted from the government's dismantling and relocation of dozens of temples, a Hindu Temple Action Committee was formed in October of 2009. Deputy Federal Territories Minister Datuk M. Saravanan announced its purpose, "It is formed to solve issues of temple construction and the merger of small temples in the capital."



HINDUISM TODAY was founded on January 5, 1979, by Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami (1927–2001). It is a nonprofit educational activity of Himalayan Academy, with the following purposes: 1. To foster Hindu solidarity as a unity in diversity among all sects

and lineages; 2. To inform and inspire Hindus worldwide and people interested in Hinduism; 3. To dispel myths, illusions and misinformation about Hinduism; 4. To protect, preserve and promote the sacred *Vedas* and the Hindu religion; 5. To nurture and monitor the ongoing spiritual Hindu renaissance; 6. To publish resources for Hindu leaders and educators who promote Sanatana Dharma. Join this seva by sending letters, clippings, photographs, reports on events and by encouraging others.



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## IN MY OPINION

# Helping the Bhutanese Refugees

How one organization supplements government assistance to settle new arrivals in the US

BY SREE N. SREENATH

**T**HE BHUTANESE IMMIGRANTS are the first poor Hindus to have arrived in the United States as refugees in large numbers, having lived for 17 years surviving on UN food assistance programs in seven camps in Nepal. When a refugee family arrives in the US with basic possessions, the government gives them food stamps, financial assistance, health screening and insurance, job search assistance, basic English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) coaching and an inexpensive apartment along a subway or bus line in a poor and often dangerous neighborhood. All of this is done through contract with a settlement agency. This contracted support lasts for eight months. After that period, the refugees are completely on their own. This is when Sewa International USA, the organization that I am president of, steps in.

Sewa is a non-profit, international, volunteer-based service organization, in partnership with Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh, that works in 30 different US cities on the Bhutanese Refugee Empowerment (BRE) Project. Our volunteers are nonresident Indians, second-generation Indian-American students and concerned Americans. A number of like-minded organizations have joined hands with us in this ambitious project.

In addition to employment and transportation (unemployment is nearly 70% in some communities), refugees face uprooting of familial and societal structures, cultural and religious isolation, language barriers, children's education needs, family issues (marriage, birth, death), conflict resolution, counseling needs, cold weather, health and hygiene issues. We give financial responsibility education, and hold job etiquette seminars and resumé writing workshops.

We help in finding entry-level employment in the hospitality and food industries, retail, customer relations, NGOs and factories. Women are employed through projects such as sewing, ironing, fabric painting,



weaving, housekeeping and value-added food product generation (e.g., pickles). Micro-finance for starting home/office cleaning or landscaping businesses, or to buy a car, is provided. We connect up a Hindu American family with a vulnerable Bhutanese family for mentoring and developing friendships.

We sponsor and conduct bhajans, yoga/meditation and festival celebrations. After 17 years of virtual incarceration in camps, the elders—functionally illiterate and numbering 40% of the workforce—have lost their skills and will to work. They have a hard time adjusting and great difficulty finding employment. We have helped start urban and rural farming programs for these ex-farmers, and we help market their produce. We also counsel students seeking higher education and provide rental assistance in cases of eviction.

One scene is etched in my mind for ever: On November 16, 2008, we met with a newly arrived group of Bhutanese Hindus in Cleveland to take them to the local mandir. Though the temperature was around freezing, most were wearing thin sweaters, no gloves and were barefoot or with only sandals. A friendly smile, a Gurkha hospitality cup of sweet, hot, boiled milk with tea from them, and a "Welcome to the US"

from us, we were suddenly bosom friends. It started snowing heavily—the first snow. To our horror, young and old alike started jumping and playing in the snow in their bare feet without headgear, jackets or gloves. To our puzzled concern about frostbite they said, "We lived in the tropics; snow is new to us. Isn't it beautiful?" That afternoon we pooled our money and bought shoes for all 35 school-going children in the group. Thus began my relationship with this beautiful and friendly community.

**SREE N. SREENATH, PH.D., is a biology professor at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland. E-mail: [n.sreenath@case.edu](mailto:n.sreenath@case.edu)**



# Giving's Secret Gifts

Consistently contributing to your religion has the power to draw spiritual fulfillment and material wealth into your life

BY SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLAN SWAMI

**G**IVING, KNOWN AS DANA IN SANSKRIT, IS built into all aspects of Hindu life—giving to the holy man, giving to the temple, giving to the astrologer, giving to the teacher, giving to a swami or a satguru for his support, over and above all routine giving to his institution. The *Tirukural*, an ancient South Indian ethical scripture, says, "The foremost duty of family life is to serve duly these five: God, guests, kindred, ancestors and oneself." This is understood by all Hindus. However, the idea that giving can be a powerful tool for attracting financial abundance is an idea that many Hindus do not have in mind.

In two verses in its chapter on hospitality, the *Tirukural* provides compelling reasons for giving: "If a man cares daily for those who come to him, his life will never suffer the grievous ruin of poverty. Those who never sacrifice to care for guests will later lament: 'We hoarded wealth, estranged ourselves, now none will care for us.'"

Materialistic thinking holds that if we hoard all the wealth we get, we will end up with more riches in life's full season. The *Tirukural* is saying the opposite. If you use your wealth to help others and care for guests, you will prosper more than if you hoarded it. Why is this? Because if we generously give to others, we will—by karma's unfailing law—attract more wealth in this and future lives.

The merit we earn through giving to others comes back to us through attracting abundance in the future. The Tamil word *punniyavan* relates to this idea. It has a double meaning: "a person of great religious merit" and "a lucky person." This concept also appears in astrological readings in which it is clear that an individual will easily attract abundance because of the good he did in past incarnations, such as in this assessment from a computerized chart: "This is an intelligent devotee, born to get money effortlessly due to past life merit." Clearly our ability to attract lasting financial abundance is directly related to the amount of religious merit we have accrued through our previous good deeds. But not all wealth comes through good deeds, and people do become rich in unrighteous ways. The *Tirukural* speaks of such wealth: "A fortune amassed by fraud may appear to prosper but will all too soon perish altogether."

It is easy to see other practical advantages of giving, too. Our reputation grows in the community. Our circle of friends expands. We become someone people want to associate with, want to do business with and, yes, want to give to. That doesn't happen with people who are stingy and selfish.

A third verse from the *Tirukural* shares another secret about giving: "Charity's merit cannot be measured by gifts given. It is measured by measuring the receiver's merits." What a brilliant insight, and so counter to common thinking. It is natural to presume that giving one hundred dollars would create more merit than giving



fifty dollars. But the saint tells us it's not just about the money, it's also about the merit of the recipient. Giving a little to a man of great spiritual attainment is more meritorious than giving a lot to an ordinary beggar.

My satguru, Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, spoke of this concept: "Karma is an unfailing natural law, simply explained by this example: Give a beggar 10 rupees. You are not giving, you are investing in your future. Somehow 20 rupees will find its way back to you. He has given you the opportunity to

give. When we give expecting to receive, the law will still work, but if we give 10 rupees, we get back 20 rupees. Unselfish giving doubles the return. Giving to a temple is different again; every 10 rupees given brings back 100 rupees in return. God pays a better interest. Giving is an investment in the future; it is not parting with something."

We can learn more about charity's efficacy from a story I heard about the Nattukottai Chettiar at Palani Hills Temple, an account documented in the temple's palm leaf manuscripts. It begins around 1600 with the arrival in Palani township of Kumarappan from Chettinad district in India's southern region. Kumarappan was the first merchant to establish a salt trade in the region of Palani. He stayed in the house of the Palani Temple priest and operated his business in the nearby street. From the beginning, he marked up his margin of profit by one-eighth and gave the markup as a *makimai* offering to the Deity of Palani Temple, Lord Velayutha. *Makimai* is a Tamil word for a donation to charity consisting of a fixed percentage of profit, income or harvested crops.

Kumarappan's donations were used, in part, to buy food that was prepared by the priest's wife and offered to the Deity by the priest. So successful was he that four years later he brought five more salt traders to Palani. All followed his example of tithing to the temple, and all flourished. News of their success reached the Pandyan king in Madurai, and Isaniya Sivachariar, the king's guru and chief Saivite priest of South India, at whose behest Kumarappan established an annual pilgrimage to Palani, which is popular to this day. Later, when entrusted with managing all funds donated to the temple, he established an endowment to provide food and shelter for pilgrims. Not only did the salt trader's generosity bring him and his clan material success and social prominence, it supported pilgrims and built up



S. RAJAM

the resources of Palani Hills Temple, so much so that today it is one of India's richest temples.

How can we determine how much to give to religious endeavors? One guideline for this comes from the *Dharma Shastras*, which caution that a householder should never give gifts beyond his means and should not make his family and dependents suffer on account of his generosity. In his *Hindu Encyclopedia*, Swami Harshananda notes that these shastras suggest ten percent of earnings as a general guideline, and they extol giving as a sacred act that helps earn religious merit and conquer greed.

Our own Saiva Siddhanta Church has, at its core, a membership that gives ten percent of their gross income to the support of our mission, monastery and monks. But we are not alone. Consider this verse still followed today by members of the Gujarat-based BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha, written some two hundred years ago by

**Giving to God:** A husband and wife, having flourished in life, credit their religion for the abundance that has come to them. Each month they bring one-tenth of their income, placing it at the feet of Dakshinamurti. It is their way of supporting the temple that has been their refuge and the swamis (behind) who have guided them on the path.

Bhagwan Swaminarayan: "My disciples shall give in donation one-tenth of their income, or food grains, if that be their agricultural income, in the service of Lord Krishna." BAPS is one of Hinduism's most wealthy and dynamic spiritual institutions. How much stronger and more effective would Hinduism be if all Hindus followed these examples and tithed to the institution of their choice?

A useful way to assess the extent of one's means to give is to create (if you don't already have one) a detailed monthly household budget showing income and all the major categories of expense, such as rent or mortgage, transportation, food, clothing and religious giving. No matter if your income is small or large, a valid approach is to start with a modest monthly donation to your favorite religious institution that easily fits into your budget.

As that regular giving accrues merit, which in turn attracts more abundance into your life, you will be able to periodically increase the amount of your religious donations up to the ideal of ten percent. Some individuals may have the ability to give more than ten percent, such as those who are single or those who are self-employed (as exemplified by our salt merchant, Kumarappan).

The best way to approach religious giving is to make it the first expense when you receive your paycheck. This has a number of advantages. 1) You do not forget to make your donation. 2) You do not spend that money on yourself and find you are unable to give to your religion this month. 3) Because you have made the religious donation your first priority, you become more conservative when faced with buying unnecessary or frivolous things.

Many Hindus do not give in a systematic way to the Hindu institution they support, such as a local temple or ashram. Instead, they wait to be asked for a donation, which they then willingly give. Compare this to setting aside money for retirement. How many people rely on their investment

manager to call and remind them to send in funds for their retirement account? None. Disciplined people are consistent in contributing monthly to their retirement savings, without being reminded, because they know they will benefit from it. Similarly, it is beneficial both to yourself and the institution you support to be just as regular in your charitable giving, and not wait to be asked. You benefit, because your religion is strengthened, and you don't miss months when you weren't reminded and thereby lose the merit of that giving. And the institution benefits by receiving a steady, reliable stream of income.

In conclusion, consistent, ardent giving to religious institutions, to God, is a duty of all Hindus. The abundance of merit you earn by giving regularly and generously creates for you—through the law of karma—greater spiritual rewards, worldly success and financial abundance in this and future lives.

## LETTERS

### Jai Swami Gopal Sharan

Your conferring such an award on Swami Gopal Sharan ("2009 Hindu of the Year," Oct/Nov/Dec, 2009) makes me very happy, and he deserves it. I am blessed to have come into contact with him and continue to enjoy his grace through the Maha Lakshmi Vidya Bhavan in Honor Oak, London.

KWABENA OFORI-AWUAH, JR.  
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### Gays Are Now Legal in India

I was pleased to see the article about the Delhi High Court decision regarding Section 377 ("Gays Are Now Legal in India," Global Dharma, Oct/Nov/Dec, 2009). Too many religions cast judgment or condemn lesbians, gays, bisexual and transgender individuals, seeing them as broken or sinful. We as Hindus, however, have portrayed same-sex relations and gender variance as normal from Vedic times to the present day through rituals, in the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, in paintings and in temple sculpture. Thus, it is refreshing to see HINDUISM TODAY enlightening Hindus that our religion does not judge and recognizes the discrimination facing the LGBT community.

While I appreciate the magazine's focus on explaining aspects of worship, I would also like to see more on how Hinduism deals with complex social issues like abortion and family planning, sexual orientation or the role of women in leadership in the temple (not just in the family). Where do the *Vedas*, differing sects of Hinduism or current Hindu leaders sit on the moral and social questions of the day?

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### Well Water Removes Sin?

In his letter in the Oct/Nov/Dec 2009 issue, Pradeep Srivastava expresses his concern about claims made for the spiritual benefits of bathing in the waters of Rameswaram Temple, which he argues may be a kind of "placebo effect." I can understand his skepticism that a single ritual, no matter how spiritually charged the location, could wash away one's sins. I would respond that for those who bathe in the wells, the experience is the culmination of a pilgrimage with many aspects. In my own case, the journey began with forming the desire and intention to go, then saving money, making travel arrangements, reorganizing my work and making prayers for obstacles to be removed. In other words, the planning and preparation began to reshape my life over a period of several months. On the trip itself, I was blessed with

walls. The temple needs major repairs and renovations. Mrs. Thirumagal, the government's commissioner, is on the right track. Hopefully she'll work on the renovation, which has been neglected for a very long time.

VAIDEHI GANESAN HERBERT  
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Rather than a passive experience, like popping a pill, pilgrimage to Rameswaram offered me an active plan for spiritual growth. I cannot say that my life since has been without sin or error. But the feeling of lightness and rejuvenation that I experienced after bathing in the wells gives me a vivid sense of what such a life might feel like, and an aspiration to continue to work towards it.

LUCY SOUTTER  
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I have two responses to the sacred bathing issue. First, I believe that temples are holy places, where God and the devas are nearer, or more easily accessible. The *sadhana* or practice of bathing will remove karma. This will be especially effective if this is the high point of a pilgrimage during which pilgrims will have considered their karma, past actions and spiritual path. Second, one of the things I have learned from many born Hindus is humility and trust in the loving grace of God when faced with differing beliefs. I would say to Mr. Srivastava that while following a path based solely on the *Gita* and the *Upanishads* is important to you in this life, and that is great, please remember that others are on different paths, and this is also great for them.

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### A Priestly Clan Under Siege

Rajiv Malik's article ("A Priestly Clan Under Siege," Oct/Nov/Dec, 2009) is very one-sided. First of all, the Tamil Chola kings built these magnificent granite temples for all the Tamils, not just for the Brahmins. In my opinion, the Tamil Nadu government has replaced the Tamil kings and administers the temple on behalf of all the Tamils.

SAI RAVIKUMAR  
CALGARY, ALBERTA, CANADA

### Help Us in South Africa

I live in Durban, South Africa. We have a huge problem here with Hindus converting to Christianity either by force, trickery or sheer ignorance. They are being converted by Indian pastors who criticize us, our practices and our culture. It works like this: The Christians will typically announce that a friend should be brought to church just to visit. Next they appear at that person's house with the intention to convert them and their entire family on the spot. Another trick is to bring

a friend to church who is undergoing some sort of difficulty, such as the recent death of a spouse. The entire congregation stands up and welcomes the newcomer, making him or her feel very special. They pray for that person, and within a week or two he or she is made to throw his or her praying lamp and Deity statues into the sea or river and is then fully converted to Christianity. New converts are taught that Hindus are sinners, worship idols and will go to hell. They are told that they are following a superior religion and will be punished seven times more if they convert back to Hinduism.

AMBER H.  
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As a devout Hindu, I am proud of the work you are doing in bringing out a quality publication that revives interest in Hinduism among all readers. However, when I came across this article in the latest issue, I realized that HINDUISM TODAY can unwittingly be a propaganda machine for disinformation and discriminatory, biased opinions.

The Chidambaram temple has been under the stifling control of the hereditary priestly clan that your article talks about for too long. This system of hereditary priesthood is the last remaining bastion of Brahmin caste-based superiority over lower castes. The Dikshitar claim that they have the sole right to the temple priesthood and are upset over this self-claimed right being snatched by the government. Who was it that gave them their hereditary rights? Have those rights ever been reviewed or reevaluated based on the changing life and times? How much revenue does the temple earn? What happens to all the income? The Dikshitar are not accountable to anyone right now.

For the information of the author, most of the big temples in Tamil Nadu have long been under the administrative control of the government. I have personally found such temples to be the best managed and best maintained ones. Unlike the impression sought to be created by the article, the government Board is not an evil and greedy entity aiming to gobble up an ancient temple and deprive the poor, suffering priests of their jobs and incomes. On the contrary, it is a well-managed and efficient body that has successfully taken over and streamlined the administration of many struggling temples.

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a friend to church who is undergoing some sort of difficulty, such as the recent death of a spouse. The entire congregation stands up and welcomes the newcomer, making him or her feel very special. They pray for that person, and within a week or two he or she is made to throw his or her praying lamp and Deity statues into the sea or river and is then fully converted to Christianity. New converts are taught that Hindus are sinners, worship idols and will go to hell. They are told that they are following a superior religion and tends to be offensive among many religions.

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Friendship Evangelism

When I was asked to locate an article relating to Hinduism in current society on your website, I became intrigued by the article "Friendship Evangelism" (Oct/Nov/Dec, 2009). I am a nondenominational Christian and was in no way offended by the article, but more surprised. It's fascinating how friendship evangelism is actually counterproductive and tends to be offensive among many religions.

Christmas. That is a Christian holiday for Christians to celebrate, not the whole world. Don't feel guilty. They have many beliefs that they would like you to also believe, but remember, that is their religion, not yours! I haven't celebrated Christmas for 20 years. When I am asked why, I respond, "I'm not Christian!"

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### Corrections

✓ In "Sri Swami Gopal Sharan Devacharya, 2009 Hindu of the Year" (Oct/Nov/Dec, 2009) the Kusum Sarovar does not have any clinic and is not part of Golok Dham, and the photos captioned "Dharmic citadel" and "Spirituality and joy" on pages 22 and 23, respectively, were provided by the Golok Dham Ashram.

✓ In "A priestly Clan Under Siege" (Oct/Nov/Dec, 2009), it is incorrectly stated that Mr. Arumugaswami is an oduvar, a singer of sacred Tamil songs called Devarams. He is a devotee from Chidambaram.

Letters with writer's name, address and daytime phone number should be sent to:

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107 Kaholalele Road  
Kapaa, Hawaii, 96746-9304 USA  
or faxed to: (808) 822-4351  
or submitted at: [www.hinduismtoday.com](http://www.hinduismtoday.com)

Letters may be edited for space and clarity and may appear in electronic versions of HINDUISM TODAY.

## Keeping the Light of Understanding Bright

### How to distribute Hinduism's most precious gifts

**A**MONG THE MANY SUBLIME WAYS readers tell us of their appreciation, once in a while, there appears a stirring declaration: "Your magazine has transformed our lives!"

One such has come from the Mrunal Patel family of Midland, Texas. "Since we discovered HINDUISM TODAY at a friend's house," explained an enthusiastic Mrs. Patel, "everything's changed for us. It has given us a depth of understanding that we couldn't have imagined. It has given us pride, unity of mind and a shared purpose. Our priorities are altogether different. We do puja and *sadhana* together, the three of us, every day, and we all live the same way, which is much different from before. We have found our path for this life."

Thirteen-year-old Pooja adds, "I am amazed how HINDUISM TODAY addresses all Hindus everywhere, of every tradition,



**"It has propelled us to another level of being."** Doctors Mrunal and Padmaja Patel with daughter Pooja.

• • • • •  
of any age. It is as much a guide and resource for me as for my parents. And I feel just as enlightened and encouraged by it as they are. How precious is that?"

The Patels wanted to give back to HINDUISM TODAY, partly out of gratitude and mostly, explains Mr. Patel, "to help the magazine reach more souls and give them the same chance to find their path and destiny that

we had. There can be no greater gift."

To make as meaningful an offering as they could, the family studied various estate planning options, then chose what seemed to them most apt for their circumstance. They made a bequest to the Hinduism Today Production Fund, a part of Hindu Heritage Endowment, by naming it as one of the beneficiaries of a charitable life insurance policy. Mr. Patel encourages others to do a similar thing: "Bequests are powerful forms of giving, that guarantee the magazine's strength into the far future."

Please consider including the Production Fund in your estate plan, so as to enable HINDUISM TODAY to reach ever more souls eager to find their way.

Ask to receive our Production Fund e-newsletter at [www.gurudeva.org/email-news](http://www.gurudeva.org/email-news). Or read more about the Production Fund and estate planning options at: [www.hheonline.org/productionfund](http://www.hheonline.org/productionfund) then click *planned giving options*. Or contact us at 808-634-5407 or [hhe@hindu.org](mailto:hhe@hindu.org)

## QUOTES & QUIPS

To define God is grinding what is already ground; for He is the only being we know.

**Swami Vivekananda** (1863-1902), founder of the Ramakrishna Mission

Hindu sages have told us that to live the spiritual life, no matter how hampered it might be, no matter with what limitations, is infinitely superior to having a mental grasp of things Divine. They have taught us that until we have woven these things into our lives, one by one and step by step, we would not be able to have a grasp of the whole of the Divine teaching. **Mahatma Gandhi** (1869-1948)

Expecting the world to treat you fairly because you are a good person is a little like expecting the bull not to attack you because you are a vegetarian. **Dennis Wholey**, American entertainer

The sages, being filled with universal love for all beings, did not want to keep their

### DID YOU KNOW?

#### USS Warships Krishna & Indra

THEY FOUGHT VALIANTLY IN WARS, defended the United States and were manned by hundreds of sea men for decades. The American Navy's *Achelous* class of ships, named after a Greek river Deity, includes the USS Krishna (left) and USS Indra (right). Built during World War II, they are the only two US Navy ships named after Hindu Gods. There are specific naming conventions. Submarines, for example, are always named after fish and marine creatures. Repair ships are named after Deities

of various religious traditions.

Both USS Krishna and USS Indra are repair ships, support units that provide maintenance and succor for other ships. At 100-meters long, they are built to be able to stand on their own in a battle.

The ships had their maiden voyage in 1945. They both participated in the Vietnam war and were functional until the 1970s, when USS Krishna was sold and USS Indra was retired. The latter was ceremonially sunk in 1992 off the coast of North Carolina, in an effort to create an artificial coral reef.



BOTH PHOTOS US NAVY

enlightenment to themselves. They declared to all: "O mortals, striving and struggling upon this Earth plane, weeping, wailing, buffeted by the vicissitudes of life: we have come upon a great discovery. There is something beyond these appearances, these vanishing names and forms that go to make up this universe. There is something beyond, which is the very source and support of all these objects of the phenomenal world. Why do you search in vain for happiness outside? Come, come, happiness resides within." **Swami Chidananda** (1916-2008), president of the Divine Life Society

Build your inner environment. Practice silence! **Paramahansa Yogananda** (1893-1952), founder of Self-Realization Fellowship

In May, 2009, the Western media was celebrating the success of an American ecologist's first expedition to Everest, led by his much less famous *sherpa* guide. One newspaper, the Salt Lake Tribune, simply stated in its headline: "Apa Sherpa Summits Mount Everest for the 19th time."

Life is a pilgrimage. The wise man does not rest by the roadside inns. He marches direct to the illimitable domain of eternal bliss, his ultimate destination. **Swami Sivananda of Rishikesh** (1887-1963), founder of the Divine Life Society

For seven lives in seven bodies the grateful will remember friends who relieved their anguish and affliction. **Tirukural 107**

Disease is but a milestone; neither is good health our greater purpose in life. We are wellness. We are consciousness. That is our natural state. **Swamini Mayatitananda**, founder of the Wise Earth Monastery

Man flows at once to God when the channel of purity is open. By turns our purity inspires and our impurity casts us down. He is blessed who is assured that the animal is dying out in him day by day, and the divine being established. **Henry David Thoreau**, (1817-1862), American Transcendentalist author

I believe that dance communicates man's deepest, highest and most truly spiritual thoughts and emotions far better than words, spoken or written. **Ted Shawn** (1891-1972), American dancer

The road to success is always under construction. **Anonymous**

Do not pray for easy lives. Pray to be stronger men. Do not pray for tasks equal to your powers. Pray for powers equal to your tasks. Then the doing of your work shall be no miracle, but you shall be the miracle. **Phillips Brooks** (1835-1893), American author

Silence is the language of the real. **Nagarjuna** (ca. 150-250), Buddhist philosopher

Many people are afraid of silence. They have to be doing something all the time. Many people also are afraid of being alone. But actually no one ever is alone. He's always with his great divine Self. Every person has a great, divine Self within him, an absolutely perfect, shining, sublime being of light. The voice of this being is a loud silence. The voice of your soul is a loud silence. Many people have said that the voice of God is a deep, profound silence. **Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami** (1927-2001), founder of HINDUISM TODAY

### Snapshots

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### BASICS OF HINDUISM

#### Moksha, Freedom from Rebirth

THE DESTINY OF ALL SOULS IS MOKSHA, liberation from rebirth on the physical plane. Our soul then continues evolving in the Antarloka and Sivaloka, and finally merges with God like water returning to the sea.

Moksha in Sanskrit comes from the root *muc*, meaning "to let loose." The Mahamrityumjaya mantra intoned at the heart the *Rig Veda* says, "May we be freed from the bondage of death as a cucumber from its stalk."

Hindu scripture tells us that moksha comes when earthly karma has been resolved, dharma well performed and God fully realized. Each soul must have performed well through life's varied experiences in order to not be pulled back to physical birth by a deed left undone.

Though all souls are destined to achieve moksha, the breaking of samsara's chains

will not necessarily happen after this one life. While seeking and attaining profound realizations, Hindus know there is much to be done in fulfilling life's other *purusharthas*, or goals: dharma (righteousness), *artha* (wealth) and *kama* (pleasure.) Moksha is the last goal to be desired and the last one to be attained.

Both old and young souls are on a journey to realize God, whether they understand this or not. Old souls renounce worldly ambitions and take up sannyasa at a young age, striving on the quest to let go of the world. But all Hindus use the later years of life to move closer to moksha by intensifying spiritual practices, tying loose ends and letting go of attachments.

The *Vedas* say, "If here one is able to realize Him before the death of the body, he will be liberated from the bondage of the world."

After moksha, subtle karmas are made in inner realms and swiftly resolved, like writing on water. Eventually, at the end of each soul's evolution comes *vishvagrasa*, total absorption in God.



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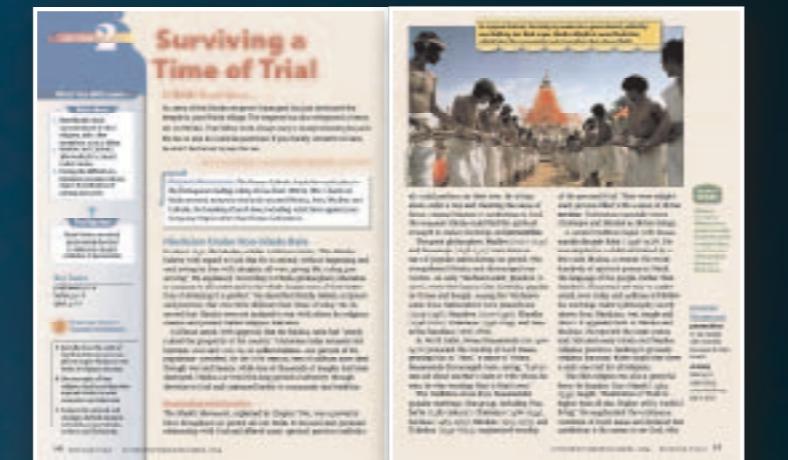
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## Response to Lesson 3

I am impressed with the sincere honesty and frankness expressed in the text regarding the tragic violence of invasion, conquest, and colonization of India. I particularly like the message of cultural persistence and continuity that this history conveys. This pamphlet also wonderfully recognizes the ability of school children to grasp true meanings in history and culture. Sometimes, we omit too much information from our children in our desire to protect them; doing so harms them and disrespects their intellect.—Michael K. Ward, PhD, Visiting Lecturer in History, California State University, Northridge



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## FROM THE AGAMAS

# The Means to Oneness with God

Excerpts from a uniquely clear ancient text on yoga and realization

The following text is from the section on yoga of Sarvajnanottara Agama. It deals with preparation, posture, breath control, mantra and perception of the 36 tattvas or categories of existence, leading to attainment of oneness with Lord Siva. The Agama is told to Lord Skanda by Siva Himself.

**O** SHANMUKHA! I WILL EXPLAIN THE DISCIPLINES OF YOGA. These are appropriate for a duly qualified person who lives alone, apart from the company of worldly minded persons. He should have a deep sense of detachment achieved by keeping his mind under control. He should take food in moderation, limit his routine worldly activities and sleep moderately. Listen to my instructions on yoga for such a *sadhaka*.

Only that *sadhaka* who knows well the nature of meditator, meditation and the fruit of meditation is fit enough to undertake the disciplines of yoga. The individual self is the meditator. The mind is the instrument of meditation. The Great Lord Siva is the One to be meditated upon. The attainment of the supreme qualities of Siva, superior to which there is nothing, is the fruit of meditation.

The *sadhaka* should continuously practice the disciplines of yoga while keeping the mind well balanced, whether honored or abused, delighted or distressed. He should be no longer subject to excessive delight, fearfulness or despondency.

The *sadhaka* should find a suitable place for his yoga practice, such as a solitary house, a charming monastery, an auspicious temple charged with divinity, a solitary river bank, his own house, an impenetrable forest or a sequestered spot hidden among the trees. This place should be well protected from the scorching sun and not be owned by others. It should be free from disturbing sounds and the presence of humans, animals, insects or anything else which might hinder or disturb the practice of yoga.

The *sadhaka* should immerse himself in the disciplines of yoga after taking the usual ceremonial bath. He should sustain purity in body and mind by performing the additional rites such as the application of holy ash and sprinkling with consecrated water. He should prostrate before Lord Siva and before his guru who initiated him into the discipline of yoga.

There are many postures suitable to yoga practice. They include *padmaka* (lotus posture), *svastika*, *ardha pitha*, *ardha chandra*, *sarvabhadra* and so forth. The *sadhaka* should assume a posture comfortable to him, sit upright with his head aligned and fold his hands together in supplication. He should release all negative thoughts from his mind. O, Guha, with his mind focused within his own self, the *sadhaka* should thus practice yoga.

The *sadhaka* should repeat the *mula* mantra of Siva (such as "Om Ham Haum Sivaya Namah") exactly as instructed by his guru. He should do so without allowing the upper row of teeth to touch the lower teeth or his tongue to touch the corners of his mouth. He should keep his eyes half-closed and turned upwards. Repetition of the *mula* mantra is also essential for pranayama, breath control, and *pratyahara* (withdrawal of the senses).

The systematic repetition of the *mula* mantra illuminates and reveals to the embodied self all the 36 *tattvas* (categories of existence),



**Unity:** Through meditation, the sincere *sadhaka* can attain "unfailing and inseparable union with Lord Siva's luminous form"

including the subtle elements (*tanmatras*) and others. O, Shanmukha! The *sadhaka* thus becomes capable of severing the bonds born of these *tattvas* through the intense repetition of *astra* mantra ("Om Hah Astraya Hum Phat") invoking Lord Siva's revealing grace as taught to him by his guru.

The skilled *sadhaka* should deeply meditate on Lord Siva after equalizing and arresting the out-breath and the in-breath, thereby allowing the breath to flow through and within the central channel of the spine, the *sushumna*.

Through the continued practice of such discipline, the *sadhaka* can establish himself in unfailing and inseparable union with the Lord Siva's luminous form, which is subtle, pervasive, eternal and unchanging. (continued next issue)

DR. S. P. SABHARATHNAM SIVACHARYAR, 67, of the Adisava priest lineage is an expert in ancient Tamil and Sanskrit, specializing in the *Vedas*, *Agamas* and *Silpa Shastras*. The revered *Sarvajnanottara Agama*, is not counted among the 28 *Saiva Agamas*, but is believed to excel them all in its presentation of the monastic Saivite view.

The *Vedas* and *Agamas* are the divinely revealed and most revered scriptures, shruti, of Hinduism, likened to the Torah (1200 BCE), Bible New Testament (100 CE), Koran (630 CE) or Zend Avesta (600 BCE). The oldest portions of the *Vedas* may date back as far as 6,000 BCE. The *Saiva Agamas* are also ancient, but dating is uncertain.

Bhutanese refugees housed at Beldangi II Camp (Southern Nepal) pose for a photo at the base of the water tower



THOMAS KELLY

# America Here We Come

## SPECIAL FEATURE

### Chased from Bhutan, 106,000 Hindus find homes abroad

AS OF SEPTEMBER, 2009, 17,000 OF AN EXPECTED 60,000 Bhutanese Hindus have arrived in the United States as refugees. Another 40,000 are destined for resettlement in Canada, Australia, New Zealand and Europe. HINDUISM TODAY sent correspondent Rajiv Malik and photographer Thomas

Kelly to one of the camps in Nepal, correspondent Lavina Melwani to the Bronx, New York, and enlisted community volunteers in Ohio and Texas. All contributed to the following report on a mass Hindu migration and the challenges and opportunities faced by this relatively poor and unevenly educated community.



PHOTOS: THOMAS KELLY



RAJIV MALIK

*(Counter-clockwise from upper left) The habitations are simple and structurally weak, made of bamboo and adobe, designed to be bulldozed with ease. After two decades, many are in a dilapidated condition. Preparing coal briquettes to use as fuel, burning of which has adverse impacts on health. Good education, taught in English, provides a doorway to a better future. Weaving Nepalese traditional clothing. Water bottles abound in the absence of plumbing. A local priest inside a small Lakshmi temple.*



RAJIV MALIK

## Life in the Camps

BY RAJIV MALIK, NEW DELHI

**N**INETEEN YEARS AGO, ONE HUNDRED thousand Hindus—one-sixth of the population of Bhutan—left that country in a massive exodus to escape vicious persecution. Bhutan's Drukpa majority, followers of Tibetan Buddhism, declared the Hindus, who migrated to Bhutan a hundred years ago, to be illegal immigrants. They were stripped of rights, then attacked and finally forced to leave the country. Refused sanctuary in neighboring India, the refugees reached Nepal and have been living ever since in "temporary" camps, ignored by the Indian press and knowing little but unfulfilled hope, anger and resignation.

These Bhutanese Hindus are the latest large group to have been accepted for asylum in the United States. Beginning in 2008, thousands began to leave the camps for cities all over America. While a few other countries have agreed to take some refugees, a full 60 percent will go to the US.

Moving such a population, even at a rate of 1,500 per month, considering relocation to all countries, takes time. The first and bravest are already established in far-flung places like New York and Utah; while relatives remain in the camps, receiving letters with tales of the New World and anxiously—sometimes hesitantly—awaiting their turn. During the wait, they take classes on the various aspects of modern Western life, which is much different from anything most

have ever known.

The area provisionally granted to the refugees by Nepal is in Damak, 650 km from the capital, near the narrow part of India that separates Nepal from Bhutan. The climate there in September was hot and unpleasantly humid, a far cry from the cooler Bhutanese weather.

The camps are overseen by the International Organization for Migration, an intergovernmental agency founded after World War II to manage and care for the millions displaced by that conflict. Today, IOM, backed by 127 member countries, is the unofficial guardian of those who, like the Bhutanese Hindus, live in limbo, with where no country is home. Now that some countries have agreed to accept Bhutanese refugees, the IOM and the United Nations Refugee Agency decide together who will go to each country, with family unity a major consideration.

### Beldangi II

There are seven main encampments near Damak. The largest, holding 22,000 Bhutanese, is Beldangi II—a warren of bamboo huts, tall trees and ubiquitous mud. It is accessible (at least, when the rivers are not in flood) only via a circuitous unpaved road. The IOM arranged for HINDUISM TODAY to visit and interview residents here.

Impressions on entering the camp are mixed. The lush green trees provide a pleasant atmosphere, in contrast to the litter and garbage on the paths between the huts. A few structures of round, curved shiny metal,

resembling satellite antennas, are actually solar heaters, used to boil water and sterilize utensils. Hundreds of curious, excited children flock out to follow foreign visitors, especially intrigued by HINDUISM TODAY's American photographer, Thomas Kelly, who speaks fluent Nepalese.

The home of Mr. Mano Rath Chamalgai, 67, is a cramped hut with no electricity. As night fell, a curious mob crowded the door and windows. The patriarch was the first to speak, nostalgically relating a tale that is representative of most in the camps: "In Bhutan I had a very good life. I was a farmer, with my own land and a nice house to live in. We had electricity there. But the Bhutanese government and army were cruel to us, and that was the reason we had to leave Bhutan. The eighteen years we have spent here have been very difficult."

His wife, Man Maya Chamalgai, 65, fears the future. "I am in a big dilemma. I have been living here for a long time. Now the future is uncertain. I do not know what is going to happen to us once we are in USA. I am not sure what kind of life we will lead there." Their two daughters, Lekha Devi and Parvati, know nothing but life as refugees. "I do not have the citizenship of any country right now," says Lekha Devi. "In the USA, I hope my dreams will come true."

Mr. Chamalgai continues, "My ancestors and forefathers migrated to Bhutan from Nepal. Our customs and traditions are similar to those that prevail in Nepal. So, we belong in Nepal." Nepal, however, refuses to grant them residency (see page 31).

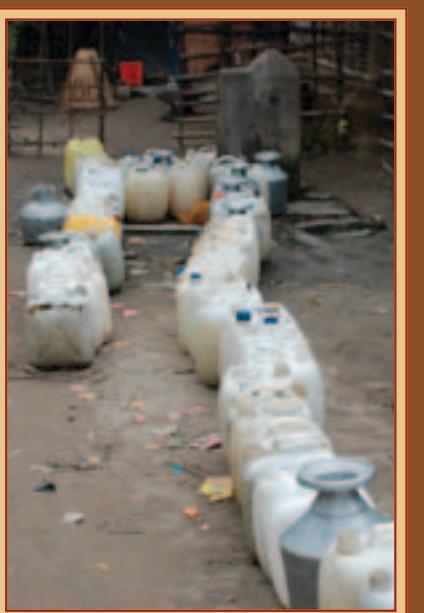
### Exiled from Bhutan

Bhutan's ethnic purge began in 1990. Making wide use of intimidation, bureaucratic dead-ends and suspended rights, the government organized a massive migration of all families that could not meet the draconian requirements for citizenship—expelling fully one-sixth of the country's population. Forced to sign "voluntary migration forms," Bhutanese Hindus were taken to Nepal. Because the Nepalese government denied them citizenship status—most had no acquaintances or family they could trace back to Nepal—they became refugees, not legally bound to or welcomed by any nation.

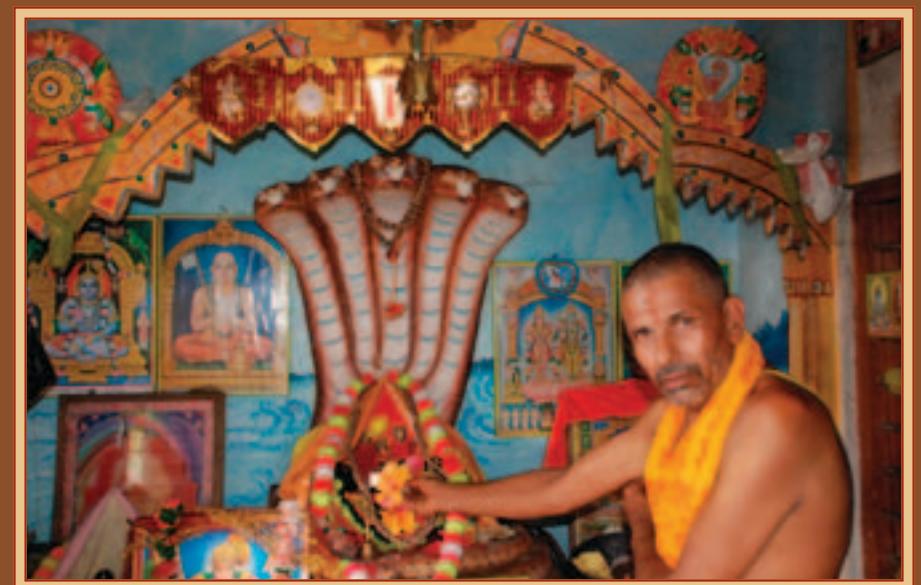
Prem Paykurel, too, had been a successful farmer in Bhutan. His memories of the expulsion are fresh in his mind: "When we left Bhutan, the agitation for restoration of democratic rights was going on. Even though I was not involved, I was arrested and beaten. Finally, we were given an ultimatum by the Bhutanese authorities to leave the country. But we never thought that we would have to live in Nepal for 18 years."

Paykurel is the head of a family whose migration to America was followed by HINDUISM TODAY (see sidebar, page 27). At the time of this interview, two of Prem's children had already flown to America. He and his family feel the time for their better future has finally come. "I have waited for so long living in these camps, thinking a day would come when we would go back to our native Bhutan," he laments. "Life has been really miserable here, and especially the children went through a lot. I am taking

## Temporary for Nineteen Years



PHOTOS: RAJIV MALIK





this decision of going to USA only because it will ensure a good life for them. But I know my wife and I will have to endure many hardships."

#### A Time of Transition

For most refugees, it seems, a buoyant hope for a bright future keeps the painful past at bay, but some have lost much. Yogacharya Narayan Adhikari held a high position in Bhutan: "For many years I was an elected member of parliament, the national assembly of Bhutan. I represented our people and tried to serve the interests of all in the best possible way. Then there was cultural and religious annihilation done by the Bhutan government. First, they made a certain dress compulsory: everyone was supposed to wear only that. Then, all that was deemed not part of the official culture was forbidden."

Adhikari's current focus is on teaching yoga and meditation in America once he relocates to Pennsylvania, where some of his relatives are already settled. His main message is: "Youth must always remember their duties towards dharma. We Bhutanese refugees have to be known as good people, of right conduct and behavior. Our youth must live correctly for us to get a good image all over the world."

Hinduism is intrinsically woven into the identity of the people here. It was one of the main factors that distinguished them from the dominant Drukpa Bhutanese. They are free to practice Hinduism in the camps, and conversion efforts are forbidden by the camp administrators. There are several small temples in Beldangi II. Sitaram Adhikari, priest of the Lakshmi Temple, shares, "Without the temple, none of us could feel blissful and peaceful."

He worries that he will have trouble finding puja supplies in the US: "Kusha, till, au and tulsi are four things we must have for our puja, but we cannot take the seeds

with us." He and a few other priests perform samskaras, blessings, marriages and cremation ceremonies. There are also a number of pundits in the camps, such as Adhikari and Pundit Kashi Nath Ghimere, who completed his education in Bhutan and studied Sanskrit in India. A pundit's functions overlap with the priests', but they focus more on providing sacraments than on ritual worship. Pundit Ghimere is busy working not only among the refugees but the local Nepalese population as well. Another pundit, Bhola Nath Sapkota, carries the degree of Acharya in Sanskrit Grammar from Varanasi. He explains, "There are no differences in the Hindu dharma when it comes to Bhutanese Hindus; it is only a few traditional practices that might be unique."

#### Orientation Classes

Most of the refugees have known only the simple life of farming, working the mountainous land and living in houses made of mud mixed with yak dung. Ms. Jennifer Pro, Overseas Processing Supervisor of the IOM, knows well the challenge of integrating them into gigantic cities like New York, Cleveland or Los Angeles, each with populations many times that of Bhutan's.

In addition to a standard education for the children—some of whom surpass their American peers—the IOM provides cultural orientation classes for refugees whose move has been scheduled. The curriculum is designed to help them understand their host country and survive in it. The instructors, though called "volunteers," are paid \$500 a month. To qualify, they must have actually lived in the host country.

According to instructor Shashwat, the refugees are taught about all aspects of life in their future home, particularly those that will seem most alien to them. For example, they learn that toilets are inside the house,

and that water runs in pipes day and night. To help overcome the language barrier, short crucial sentences and key English words are taught. Refugees with just a few dozen words in their vocabulary display pride in their accomplishment, little aware of how much must yet be learned.

Classes on health and hygiene teach how the standards of personal cleanliness are much different in an American city than in the camp. Other sessions focus on flying in an airplane, what to expect at security, how the toilets work and even how to operate the control for the in-flight entertainment.

Students are encouraged to ask questions. The most basic answers may be the ones they will need the most as they brave their awkward new world. The instructors use mock settings to help them visualize, interact with and understand what they will encounter. They see and touch objects, and pass around pictures of everything from dressing styles to airport signs.

The aid programs for them in the US will be short term, so everyone is encouraged to think now about getting a job. Pictures depicting nurses, construction workers, drivers, clerks and people in other professions are passed around, eliciting animated questions from students. Yogacharya Adhikari volunteers, "We are told how to hunt for jobs so that we can become self-dependent, which is the most important thing."

#### Camp Management

David Derthick, Resettlement Program Manager for the International Organization for Migration, sighs with relief when talking about the massive effort to send the refugees to America. Notwithstanding all the work involved, it is easier, and more humane, than maintaining a refugee camp. Overall, he says, the camps have worked remarkably well over the 19 years, considering all the tensions

and potential problems. "These refugees are treated better than any refugees with whom I have worked in my whole life. The camps are well run, and the infrastructure is good. The government of Nepal has been quite benevolent toward them. In other situations I have seen, refugee camps are closed, and refugees are confined like prisoners. This is not the case here. Refugees freely move in and out of the camps. They travel to India and to Kathmandu. Technically, they should not work, but many do, and that releases some of the tensions that would arise from having tens of thousands of people idle. Some even have good jobs that pay well."

"Unfortunately, there is a rule, issued by Nepal, that structures should not be permanent. But refugees here are themselves the de facto government of the camp; they run for offices and get elected in hotly contested elections. I have found the leaders to be extraordinarily good administrators who care about their people."

The IOM, the United Nations and a Christian relief organization called Caritas provide the infrastructure and the resources for the camps. The IOM is the main organizer; the UN provides various services, including primary education and part of the funding; Caritas contributes food and provides education at the ninth and tenth grade levels.

Father Varkey Perekkatt is with Caritas Nepal, which is part of the Society of Jesus, or Jesuits, a group that, historically, has engaged in intense and widespread conversion efforts. According to Perekkatt, Caritas has a different goal. "In the curriculum in our schools there is nothing special about religion. We are not running a Hindu school or a Christian school. I am a Catholic priest, but we are here in a humanitarian, secular assistance. Under that condition, religion does not count." Refugees similarly reported that there is little or no proselytizing at the camps.

Perekkatt continues, "Ninety-five percent of those who came here were Hindus, and the rest were Buddhists. Now there are the occasional Christians, less than five percent after 18 years." He did not explain how five percent had become converted, given the camp rules prohibiting proselytization—though there are churches in the area.

Caritas' main challenge nowadays is to find, among the refugees, good school teachers who speak English, the medium of instruction. Perekkatt laments, "Last year, 600 of our 1,100 teachers left for resettlement. Soon 291 more will be leaving." This is a consequence of the policy of sending the more educated people first to the US and other countries, knowing that they will get

established more easily. But Perekkatt is still confident that the children are being properly taught. He says with pride, "Some of our students who are now in American schools have written that they are performing better than other people in their class." He says many resettled Bhutanese write to him from America, telling about their life, their jobs and their challenges. "These are good people; some are making 25 dollars an hour there." (The average *yearly* income in Nepal is \$471.)

#### Camp Conditions

The camp organizers are suffering from what Human Rights Watch calls "donor fatigue," which set in before the current recession. In December 2006, the World Food

## A People with Their Life on Hold



ALL PHOTOS THOMAS KELLY

(Left to right) Excited with the visit of journalists, children gather outside of the small huts. Many of these children will be key to a successful integration of their family in America. The Chamalgai family poses outside their hut with photos of their relatives in America. At the camp, the stone on the scale might not be a precise tool, but ensures that all will get an equal amount. Refugees receive food from the UN's World Food Programme. The WFP provides food, on average, to 90 million people per year. Recent scarcity in funding has led to supply cuts at the camps and worry among the refugees.





Program warned that it had not yet received any international donations to fund its food aid to the refugees for the next two years, and would be forced to cut their rations. Caritas stopped distributing clothing in 2002. Likewise, the UN, compelled by budgetary constraints to scale back assistance programs, stopped providing vegetables and spices to supplement basic rations. Refugees who have no outside income can now prepare only the most basic meals, with little variety and poor nutritional value. Sometimes there just isn't enough, and tensions mount.

The cutbacks have been many, and the impact is dramatic. The materials needed to fix the roofs of their simple huts, for example, are no longer available, and leaks abound. During the rainy season, entire families crowd together in the small parts of their huts that are still dry, or take shelter in another family's hut. Leaky roofs in school classrooms mean that the jute mats on which the students sit become soggy; there are no chairs, so the children must attend classes standing up.

Probably the biggest impact of budget cuts was the switch from kerosene to coal briquettes for cooking. While briquettes are cheaper, they also have serious disadvantages compared to kerosene, including health hazards.

#### The Emigration Process

The IOM estimates that 25,000 refugees have left for other countries so far. "Everything is going on smoothly. Every month about 1,500 people are leaving," says David Derthick. "I expect this to be the case for next several years. Certain refugee families here are frustrated because we have a big backlog. But I think 1,500 people is a lot, all things considered."

He describes some of the logistical challenges that can overshadow the extensive paperwork and refugee training. For three months of the year, the fog in the Damak region is so thick that few planes can fly to Kathmandu, whence refugees fly to India and then America. During other times of the year, rivers flood, making it impossible to

#### Flying to America

*(From top to bottom) With their few possessions packed, families wait to board the airplane, leaving behind, for the second time in their lives, the only place they know as home; intrigued students listen carefully at cultural orientation classes that are well-organized and effective; boarding the airplane in the small local airport, refugees fly into a new future.*



ALL PHOTOS: THOMAS KELLY



reach the camps.

Security is an constant concern. In May of 2008, two IOM buses were attacked and set on fire. No one was hurt, but Derthick says the message was clear: "There is a small group of refugees which does not want the refugees to resettle. In another incident, a grenade was thrown into this compound." Those against the resettlement feel that Bhutan should take them back, and that accepting the resettlement is a display of weakness. Others would rather be accepted as citizens of Nepal, or to receive asylum in India.

Perenkkatt explains that Nepal has tried to negotiate with Bhutan on behalf of the refugees: "Fifteen rounds of talks took place between Bhutan and Nepal. Bhutan came up with conditions very few were able to agree to, including planning a closed camp where refugees would live for two years studying Bhutan's main culture. After that, they would take exams on it and renounce their own former culture. But even that offer was restricted to only a few, and eventually withdrawn. When all this was announced, people went wild and violent. After that, many young refugees went to Maoists and wanted

to fight Bhutan's government for their rights. Many chose this path of confrontation between 2004 and 2006." Much of the anger calmed down when, in 2006, an American delegation visited the camps and offered asylum soon thereafter. But tensions and fear are still commonplace.

Vishnumaya Oli, a 27-year-old English teacher and a refugee, says, "The problem now is that almost all the educated people have already left the camp and settled abroad. Those who are here now are mostly uneducated, and many are negative in their outlook. Some create disturbance in the camp. Just a few days back, one of the camp's leaders was stabbed to death. We do not know if the murderer is a refugee or a local Nepalese with a vendetta. But things are getting worse." Vishnumaya's relatives have already left. "My parents have settled in the US, and they are extremely happy there. They call me up every day and ask me to join them."

HINDUISM TODAY asked Derthik if consideration is given to helping the Bhutanese Hindus retain their cultural and personal identities during the relocation process.

Clearly puzzled, he replied, "I will be honest: I never thought of this before. I was reading your magazine today and realized that their rich culture is a new dimension to me. Honestly, I do not know. Here we are just giving them nuts-and-bolts information on how to survive in America and other countries." He adds, however, that in selecting the country of resettlement the UN "values the importance of family unity and would not send some members of a family to Australia and others to the United States."

#### Arriving in America

BY LAVINA MELWANI, NEW YORK

**O**NE CAN ONLY IMAGINE WHAT A HUL-  
abaloo there would be if America were to push out thousands of its naturalized citizens, stripping them of all rights, based simply on the language they spoke or the faith they practiced! Yet Bhutan has managed to do this with impunity, destroying the lives of thousands of its own citizens who thereafter languished in refugee camps, their lives disrupted and put on hold. Youth who were born in the camps

## How America Deals with Refugees

**T**he Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration of the US State Department is responsible for the initial phases of refugee resettlement. In fiscal year 2009, which ended on September 30, 2009, the US accepted 74,652 refugees from countries all over the world. 18,833 refugees were admitted from Iraq, 18,202 from Burma (Myanmar) and 13,452 from Bhutan. These three countries accounted for nearly 70% of all US refugees for the year. The bureau attempts to spread out the refugees' arrivals through the year at about 1,000/week so as to not overwhelm the ten "Resettlement Agencies" that work under contract with the State Department.

There are five Christian agencies, including the US Conference of Catholic Bishops, one Jewish agency, three secular ones and the State of Iowa. These, in turn, work with approximately 350 "affiliates," often local branches of the resettlement agencies, which are located in all 50 states. The responsibility of these groups lasts for just eight months, during which they supply the refugees with basic necessities and core services while assisting them to achieve economic self-sufficiency "as soon as possible after their arrival," according to the agreement between the agencies and the government. Refugees are entitled to work as soon as they arrive in the US; after one year they may apply for permanent residence ("Green Card"). The Green Card would not be denied except under unusual circumstances. After five years as a permanent resident, they may apply for citizenship.

Gina Wills, public affairs specialist of the Bureau, told HINDUISM TODAY that there is a meeting each Wednesday at which the placement of incoming refugees is determined by the resettlement agencies themselves. The agencies match the specific needs of each family, or individual with the particular resources available in the community of the agencies' affiliates. Where refugees end up is

mostly a function of available capacity in an affiliates' community. From time to time, when local conditions dictate, some affiliates are unable to take on any more refugees. One example would be a city where entry-level jobs are not available. Family reunification is a primary goal.

The system is not perfect, Wills said, but "America has been resettling refugees for a long time." "People do better," she explains, "if they dive right in. We know it is hard, but if refugees who are able to work start working as soon as possible, they will assimilate and feel truly a part of the country sooner." She noted that the current economic downturn has highlighted weaknesses in the refugee resettlement program, and that the White House has created an interagency task force to explore how to improve the program.

Wills was pleased to hear of the Hindu organizations helping after the initial eighth month period, which they readily admit is too short and are trying to lengthen. We asked about attempts to convert, common to relief efforts, such as those following the 2004 tsunami. Wills pointed to the agreement between the agencies and the

Bureau, which requires faith-based agencies and affiliates to keep their religious activities separate from their refugee work, and that they "may not require refugees to profess a certain faith or participate in religious activities in order to receive services." She expressed interest in learning of any activities to the contrary, either in the Nepal camps or in the US.

The Statue of Liberty says upon its base, "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, the wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me." It is a promise first made in 1866, and one kept to this day by the USA, aided by hundreds of charitable organizations across the country.





have wasted the best years of their lives—up to 20 years—living in limbo, with no dreams and no future. Two decades have been spent as stateless people, belonging nowhere, allowed to have no allegiance, no sense of purpose.

Difficult as their situation has been, there is a silver lining: the offer of the United States to resettle up to 60,000 of the 106,000 refugees. About 8,000 have already arrived in the US and been given government assistance to settle down. But this help is for just eight months, after which they have to fend for themselves. Many of the refugees speak no English and have no marketable skills. What will life be like for them as they try to get their bearings in a world light years removed from their simple rural existence, first in Bhutan, and then in Nepal? Certainly their lives will be very different. And each family's situation will vary depending on the towns and cities they land in, from Ohio to Georgia to California, New York and New Jersey. Those here now are finding the people, the economy, the climate and even the language vastly different between Anchorage, Alaska; Oakland, California; Houston, Texas; Atlanta, Georgia; and right here in New York City, where just about everyone's ancestor came as a refugee from one country or another over the last two centuries.

#### The Bronx's Little Bhutan

A Little Bhutan is taking shape in the rough, hard-nosed Bronx borough of New York. The Bronx is a traditional landing place for immigrants—at any given time in the last



BIJAY DIXIT



LAVINA MELWANI



LAVINA MELWANI

(Left) The Internet has been a boon for the community to keep in touch worldwide; (above top) Houston Bhutanese teens gather for a group portrait in their school uniforms; (above lower) Jaya Narayan, 78, conducts aarti in his simple home shrine



hundred years, one-third of its residents have been foreign born.

T.P. Mishra, now 25, was just six years old when his father was beaten up, kept under police surveillance and then stripped of his citizenship. The whole family was expelled from Bhutan, and since then Mishra knew no other home but the congested huts of the refugee camp until he arrived in the US on July 2, 2009.

Mishra lives in a rundown, bleak and yet somehow handsome old apartment building, a place with an unkempt, struggling patch of grass in front. In this hard neighborhood, even the grass has to fight to survive. In Mishra's apartment, there is scant furniture and the barest of necessities. There are no fancy décor items, just a black sofa, a chair and, on one side, a couch where he sleeps. The bedroom is shared by his two sisters, Tika and Dillu. The parents are still in the camp, waiting their turn.

A miniature flag has pride of place on his side table, a part of his life wherever he goes, wherever he lives. It is his identity. It is the flag of Bhutan, the country that disowned

him. For Mishra, as for all the refugees, it tells a tale of unrequited love. Mishra is more fortunate than most: he has an education that is enabling him to do some worthwhile things. With his faithful laptop by his side, he is a journalist in exile; and he provided HINDUISM TODAY a window into the world of the Bhutanese refugees. The voice of his community, he has his own website ([www.tpmishra.com](http://www.tpmishra.com)) and two blogs.

Mishra's sister Tika is a lovely girl, but she looks wan and pale, low in joy and smiles. She is learning English through the International Rescue Committee, the resettlement agency. The days seem to hang heavy on her, as she has no job. Her younger sister Dillu is working in a factory, packing food. As they improve their English, their access to the outside world will increase.

Mishra's building houses the largest settlement of Bhutanese refugees in the New York area: 50 people in 9 families living in the same walk-up building. They move easily among each other's units, eating together, chatting about world and personal matters, almost like an extended family of many

cousins, uncles and aunts. Those who have left their parents behind in the camp look to the elders here as surrogate parents. As in a family, everyone is closely connected. Says Mishra: "Sometimes I feel I'm not in America—I still feel I'm within the camp or with my community. If I lack anything, I can come down to my neighbor's and open the fridge and take what I need. And if they lack anything they can come to me."

HINDUISM TODAY also visited the family of Jaya Narayan, 78, and his wife Nar Maya, 68. The whole family—sons, daughters, grandchildren and grandparents—are dressed in traditional garb, the men with Nepali topi or cap, the women with Nepalese scarves and jewelry, their faces leathery and weather-beaten. Happy to meet another Hindu, they take their visitor to their small makeshift shrine for their evening *arati*. Nar Maya lights a *divya* and her husband blows loudly on the small conch as the family gather close. Hindu values are intact here. No matter how little the refugees have, they share it, even with strangers. The steaming, sweet milky chai, served in steel tumblers, is

## Jump Starting a New Life

BY LAVINA MELWANI, NEW YORK

**T**here are some new neighbors in Cleveland, and they are not the Smiths or the Joneses but the Pyakurels—the same family Rajiv Malik met and interviewed in Nepal just a few weeks ago. Meet Prem Prasa and his wife Chhala Maya, both 47. Their two sons are Indra, 25, and Tika Ram, 14, and the daughters are Nirmala, 23 and Sabitra, 17. They were confined in the camp for 17 years and have just stepped into the brightness and vastness of America. They left Nepal in late September, 2009. HINDUISM TODAY's team met them both at the camp and as they departed Kathmandu. They are joining two of their brothers and their families already in Cleveland, Ohio, as part of the US government's family reunification scheme. Through August, 2009, 152 Bhutanese had been settled here.

Their nephew Hari Bhakta, who is already settled in this Midwest city, introduces us to them and tells us about their lives. He says his uncle, Prem Prasa, was a farmer in Bhutan and served as a gatekeeper in a school at the camp in Nepal. His uncle was most intrigued by the language and climate differences in America. He would return to farming, if it is available. Says Hari: "My uncle came here for the better education of his children, for the progress of his family and to live as a citizen."

Asked about the emotions of his aunt on coming to America and whether she spoke any English, he says, "She feels pleasant and happy on reaching America because she hopes to live a better life. She does not speak English but is able to write her family names in English." It is typical of refugees from any country to the US that the elders seldom learn the language, while the middle age learn just enough to hold a job. It is only the young who actually become fluent. Hari says that his young cousins will continue their education while working part time. "They feel that they are going to live as Americans and do better in the future."



Hinduism Today correspondent Rajiv Malik (right) waves goodbye to the Pyakurel family (father Prem Prasa in cap, son behind and wife and daughter in front) just prior to their flight to the US



delicious.

Their home shrine is in a closet, with coats hung incongruously on top. On the wall are calendars with the images of Sri Krishna and Lakshmi, and in the shrine photos of their family members who have passed on. An oil lamp *divya* burns on the table, a makeshift attempt to retain religion in their daily life.

Narayan's large, shining computer contrasts with the Spartan furnishings. The refugees have learned that a computer is essential for connecting with their community, be they in Australia or Wisconsin, USA. Through video, they can watch each other and laugh and talk together. Young and old gathered around the computer, having a video chat with their daughters in Australia.

The Bronx Bhutanese were getting ready for Dashain. The country of Nepal shuts down for two weeks each year in September/October to celebrate. Abi Sivakoti says, "We pray for ten days, and on the tenth day we get blessings and *tikka* from our parents. We have a very good meal, and that's how we celebrate. There are so many pandits in the refugee camps but there isn't one here. We do hope to get one here because we don't want to miss out on our culture."

#### Mangala Sharma, Activist

Mangala Sharma, now living in Minnesota, came to the US in 2000 after receiving political asylum. Since then, she has been working to advocate on behalf of the refugees. She explains, "I was born and raised in Bhutan. In fact, I am the fourth generation of women born in Bhutan in my family. I used to work for the United Nations; then I lived in a refu-

gee camp in Nepal."

Sharma says the 300 Bhutanese already in Minnesota have formed Nirvana Center, a collaborative effort with local Hindu families. The Center provides familiar food items, winter clothes and other necessities to arriving refugees. Sharma shares, "So far, Minneapolis has been very good place for resettlement. We have many more benefits than other states."

She says what while most of the people come from a farming background, the community also includes some professionals who are both studying and working, thus preparing for the future. All are Hindu. She mentions, "Nirvana Center is the outcome of people's needs and hunger to preserve our culture and religion. We have satsang every fortnight, and we completed the Art of Living workshop, which people loved."

#### Impressions and Challenges

Santi Ram Poudel spent 16 long years in Maidhar Refugee Camp. Before that he lived in the village of Lalihapper, a backward and remote place where there were no motor roads, schools or markets. During the 1990s, he recalls, Bhutan used its military and civil servants to wipe out the Nepali-speaking Southern Bhutanese through torture, rape, murder and burning of homes. Poudel was one of the lucky ones. He obtained an education under these difficult circumstances—though his Master of Science in Urban Planning from Tribhuvan University, Katmandu, means little in America. Presently he is a coordinator in a nonprofit assisting immigrants.

Insightful and articulate, Poudel shares his

observations and impressions. First off, he confides, "I thought all the Americans are multi-millionaires. I thought on every corner of the street people will hire for a job and it won't be hard to get employment. Things didn't happen that way, and it is really tough and challenging to find jobs. Initially we thought we won't find people who would help us but we found people who not only helped us but cared for us. They touched our lives. My three uncles and their families are resettled at South Dakota."

He found life in the camps left them totally unprepared for the US. While they were happy to escape the growing discontent, he says, "the cost of resettlement is too high. Most had not expected life to be so different. Some are really disturbed, our seniors especially. Be it buying groceries, banking, making appointments or job interviews, people are having multi-dimensional catastrophes."

Poudel wants to pursue graduate studies, but must balance that desire with his need to make money and his essential role in the community: "For some, I need to write their checks, read the letters and interpret for them, solve family issues, encourage and provide moral support."

He expressed a common dilemma, present even for refugees in the camps: "If I make a phone call or visit my relatives in Bhutan, the government will suspect them and may expel them. This is how the life is!" Still, he affirms, "I respect my country and I feel proud to be a Bhutanese citizen. It may take time to resolve the crisis, but it will be resolved. The fourth king of Bhutan realized his mistakes and he did not hesitate to abdi-

cate his throne. The fifth king is far-sighted and a visionary leader."

#### American Hindus Step Up

The Bhutanese refugees present a new scenario for the American-Hindu community: how to help a largely uneducated group of Hindus settle down. Nearly all previous immigrants from the Indian region have been educated professionals for whom carving a niche in America was little challenge. But this group is different, and a number of Hindu temples and organizations have stepped in to help.

Sree N. Sreenath (see his *In My Opinion*, page 9) is president of Sewa International, one of the key Hindu-American organizations working with the Bhutanese across America ([www.seausa.org/bhutanese-refugee-empowerment-project](http://www.seausa.org/bhutanese-refugee-empowerment-project)).

He explains the challenges: only about 20% of the group have any college education and hence a working knowledge of English. These have gotten and held jobs, and bought their first cell phone, computer and used car. At the other end of the spectrum are some 40% who are functionally illiterate. They speak only Nepali—not even Hindi, which would help them get jobs in Indian businesses. Another 20% are under-employed. The work is mostly minimum wage—restaurants, motels, convenience stores, gas stations and the like.

These are legal workers, and that is an advantage. They've appealed for jobs from the business community, and, as one community leader said, "have had some great successes—and some spectacular exploitation."

The employment situation, Sreenath ex-

plains, varies greatly. California and the South, except for Texas, have been hard-hit by the recession. Depending on location, unemployment can run 30 to 80%. Employment is the biggest challenge; after that is cultural adjustment, especially for the older ones. Cold winter weather, which keeps them indoors, is a great hardship for those with no transportation."

Asked how the Bhutanese have been received by the Hindu community, Sreenath replies, "In all the places that Sewa International has been working, the Hindu community has more than embraced them. In a few places Sewa International does not have volunteers, and the community is left to fend for themselves. But even then, the refugees are pleasantly surprised by the warmth that mainstream America has shown them."

#### Looking Forward

The stars in this drama, Sreenath recounts with pride, are the children. "There are many straight-A students. Those who were in high school in the Nepal camps are a year ahead in math and science compared to the local American students. Of course, they are struggling with English and social studies, due to language."

Sreenath feels the Bhutanese accept America as home. "Having lived in jail-like, squalid camp conditions for 17 years, they find US to be a paradise—especially once they find a job and settle down. The ones who are in their 30s would like to go back, but only as tourists. The children couldn't care less."

#### Religious Persecution Persists

The refugees' Hindu faith sees them through their tribulations. Yet it is this Hindu faith and culture which—almost outlawed by Bhutan—has, to a large extent, been responsible for their loss of homeland. And now, even in America, that same Hindu faith is under siege, as some refugees report coercion to embrace Christianity. On the line are jobs, material comforts and an easier life.

The resettlement agencies handling the refugees for the first eight months are expressly forbidden to proselytize among them. But such efforts have been an issue. Sreenath says, "All refugees tell us that the missionaries who visited them in the camps said that there are no Hindu temples in the US. Everyone is a Christian, and they will also have to become one, and it is better they do so right away because they will get better benefits. This kind of talk continues to be a problem in the southern states here. But wherever Sewa International is working, the missionary activities are low, if non-existent."

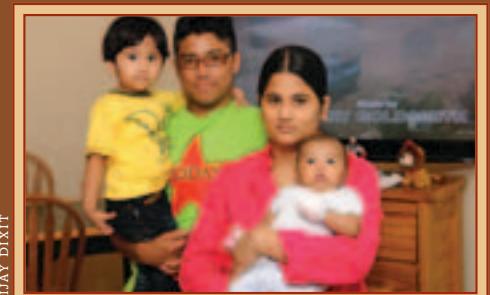
#### How to Help

You can contact Sewa International through their web site, or track down the Bhutanese in your area using public-domain government documents available at [www.scribd.com/ht\\_resources](http://www.scribd.com/ht_resources). They include lists of all cities the refugees are settled in and a list of all local sponsoring agencies contracted to the government. There are only a few in any given area, so it should be possible to find the one working with the Bhutanese and arrange to contact a community representative. Such support is golden.

## An Emphasis on Family & Community



(Left to right) Bhutanese girls dancing at a Hindu community event, October 18, 2009; Mahesh and Durga Neopaney, both 26, with Marisha, 3, and Mandeep, 3 months; Bhutanese participants in the Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America summer camp in Houston, July, 2009 included young and old alike; young Bhutanese children and their mothers pose outside their apartment complex



BIJAY DIXIT



VHP HOUSTON



BIJAY DIXIT



# Human Rights Watch's Dreary Report

In 2007, the international group Human Rights Watch issued an in-depth analysis of the Bhutanese refugee situation. These are selected verbatim excerpts from that report. We begin with the report's footnote #6, Threat to a Nation's Survival. It answers—to some extent—a puzzling question: Why has Bhutan, the nation famous for trying to improve its "Gross National Happiness," expelled one-sixth of its population?



violent campaign in North Bengal in India, on Bhutan's western border, for an independent Nepali state.

## Bhutan's Ethnic Landscape

The Bhutanese refugee crisis has its roots in the history of migration to Bhutan, the resulting ethnically diverse make-up of the country's population, and the harsh policies of Bhutan's absolute monarchy towards its ethnic Nepali minority. The politically and culturally dominant Ngalongs, who live mainly in the central and western regions of Bhutan, are of Tibetan descent; their ancestors arrived in Bhutan in the 8th and 9th centuries. The Ngalongs speak Dzongkha and follow the Drukpa Kagyu school of Tibetan Buddhism, which is Bhutan's state religion. Bhutan's king, Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck, is a Ngalong. The Sharchhops, who live in eastern Bhutan, are of Indo-Burmese origin, speak Tshangla (which is closely related to Dzongkha) and follow the Nyingma school of Tibetan Buddhism. Together the Ngalongs and Sharchhops are known as Drukpas. The third major group, who differ greatly from the Drukpas in terms of culture, language, and religion, are ethnic Nepalis in southern Bhutan, called Lhotshampas; they speak Nepali and are predominantly Hindu. Ethnic Nepalis first began migrating to Bhutan in the nineteenth century. Many became eligible for Bhutanese citizenship under the 1958 Nationality Law. Moreover, from the mid-1950s ethnic Nepalis began to be admitted into the

bureaucracy, the army and the police, and were made members of the cabinet and the judiciary.

## Denial of Citizenship

By the late 1970s the Drukpa establishment had come to see the ethnic Nepalis' growing numbers and influence as a threat to Bhutan's cultural identity and the Drukpas' own privileged position. Increasingly, Bhutan's ruling elite asserted that the majority of the ethnic Nepalis in Bhutan were not in fact citizens but illegal immigrants who threatened Bhutan's "survival as a distinct political and cultural entity." The government invoked these perceived threats as justification for a series of discriminatory measures aimed at the political, economic and cultural exclusion of Bhutan's ethnic Nepalis. Two new Citizenship Acts were passed in quick succession, in 1977 and 1985, each tightening the requirements for Bhutanese citizenship.

The 1985 Citizenship Act was followed by a new census in 1988. This census amounted to a selective, arbitrary and retroactive implementation of the 1985 Act. The authorities excluded ethnic Nepalis from becoming naturalized citizens, as provided for under the 1985 Act; instead, the authorities restricted Bhutanese citizenship to ethnic Nepalis who had records, such as tax receipts, to prove residence in Bhutan in 1958–30 years before the census. Bhutanese officials classified people who could not prove residence in 1958 as non-nationals, "returned migrants," or other illegal immigrant categories, even if they possessed a citizenship



card. A series of "Bhutanization" measures in line with Bhutan's "one nation, one people" policy exacerbated a state of fear and resentment by trying to impose a distinct national identity. On January 16, 1989, the king issued a decree requiring all citizens to observe the traditional Drukpa code of values, dress and etiquette called *driglam namzha*. Then in February 1989 the government removed the Nepali language from the curriculum in all schools in southern Bhutan.

## Backlash and Expulsion

Ethnic Nepalis perceived these policies as a direct attack on their cultural identity. This led to growing unrest in southern Bhutan, culminating in mass demonstrations in September and October 1990. The government response was swift. The authorities classified all participants in the demonstrations as *ngolops* ("anti-nationals"), arresting thousands of people. The government then closed all schools in southern Bhutan and suspended health services.

Watch: "The army took all the people from their houses. My father left the house and went to India. The army sent us the form issued by the government [voluntary migration form]. They said that we had to go out. They said if you go now you will get some money. Some people got a little money. On the way [as we left Bhutan] there were many police. We were forced to sign the document. They snapped our photos. The man told me to smile, to show my teeth. He



wanted to show that I was leaving my country willingly, happily, that I was not forced to leave. Only one member of my family signed. My mother gave her thumbprint."

Some of the ethnic Nepalis who fled or were expelled from Bhutan settled in India, but most refugees ended up in Nepal.

## Nepal-Bhutan Negotiations Fail

Refugees have the right under international law to return to their own country. However, in a flawed process that was widely discredited by international observers and refugee experts, Bhutan and Nepal instituted a "joint

verification process" to determine which refugees would be able to return.

The process of "verifying" the status of refugees and placing them in one of four categories broke down after a joint Nepal-Bhutan verification team assessed only one camp, and not a single refugee has been allowed to return to Bhutan as a result of this process.

## Nepalis Remaining in Bhutan

Bhutan continues to discriminate against the remaining ethnic Nepali population in Bhutan. Ethnic Nepalis have great difficulties obtaining so-called No Objection Certificates (NOCs), which are a pre-requisite for government employment, access to higher education, obtaining trade and business licenses, travel documents, and buying and selling land. Being denied a NOC deprives a person of almost all means of earning a living. Moreover, Bhutan's remaining ethnic Nepali citizens face ongoing threats to their citizenship status. A nationwide census completed in 2005 classifies 13 percent of current Bhutanese permanent residents as "non-nationals." While most ethnic Nepalis in Bhutan do not believe that they are currently at imminent risk of being expelled from Bhutan, they fear that without citizenship cards and without NOCs, life in Bhutan will eventually become so difficult as to leave many of them with little choice but to leave the country.

## Further Expulsions?

Refugees voiced to Human Rights Watch persistent fears that Bhutan might use the resettlement offer as a pretext to force its remaining ethnic Nepali citizens to leave the country. One refugee said, "Government officials in villages are saying to Lhotshampas, 'Your relatives are going to America, why are you still here?'"



Bhutan's fifth Dragon King is crowned by his father



WIKIMEDIA

## Why Won't Nepal Accept the Refugees Permanently?

Why the ethnic Nepalese were ejected from Bhutan in the first place is a puzzling question, but equally puzzling is why Nepal, their ancestral home, refuses to grant them citizenship. A Nepalese academic gave us this candid assessment:

"In 1992, when Nepal was still ruled by King Birendra, the king invited the refugees [to Nepal] to embarrass India in the international arena. Nepal does not have a border with Bhutan. The refugees had to travel through India, making India's refusal to protect the vagrant minority very visible. These refugees were given the best possible care by the King. The Nepalese government enjoyed international prestige and benefitted from the financial aid pouring in to help the refugees. The Maoist government retained this approach.

"I am part of the large population of Madhesis, people of Indian origin who live in the Terai or plains regions of Nepal. We speak Avadhi, Maithali and Bhojpuri. The Pahadis, people of the hills and mountains, speak Nepalese, which is unintelligible to us. The

Pahadis dominate the government, army and police. We have faced discrimination for ages, but as we are 50% of the population, our votes are important. The refugees are also Pahadis.

"We are against the assimilation and settlement of the Bhutanese refugees in the Terai as they will take our land and our jobs. It is because of our opposition that the government will not consider accepting the refugees permanently.

"We Madhesis are opposed to these refugees and are sympathetic to Bhutan government. We do not expect India to give them shelter. These refugees should either go back to Bhutan or move to the Western countries."



King Birendra and Queen Aiswarya

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## CULTURE

## How India Inspired a Dance Pioneer

With little exposure to the real thing, Ruth St. Denis dazzled audiences across America and Europe with her creation of "Radha" and other Indian dances

*In our January, 2009, issue, Dr. Joshi recounted Europe's introduction to Indian dance, the 1838 debut of the bayadères, a South Indian troop of temple dancers or devadasis. In this article, she tells the story of Ruth St. Denis, one of the founding artists of modern dance, whose popular "Indian" dances of the early 20th century redefined the art as an expression of mysticism and spirituality.*

By DR. KUSUM PANT JOSHI, LONDON

**A**FTER FIRST APPEARING ON THE WESTERN stage in 1838, Indian dance once again surfaced prominently in the early 20th century. As with the bayadères in 1838, the performers of the troupe in 1906 were of Indian origin. This time, however, their lead dancer and choreographer was not an Indian, but a young American named Ruth St. Denis.

St. Denis' Indian dance pieces were attempts to convey Hindu philosophical ideas to Western audiences in a manner that would be intelligible to them. These were not authentic Indian dances, as were those of the bayadères, but were inspired by Indian themes and included the sinuous and rippling arm motions and graceful body movements and postures of classical Indian dances. St. Denis abundantly used Indian dress materials and jewelry and designed and wore long flowing costumes. To create an Eastern ambience, she used Indian brassware, ornate columns, flowers, incense and other creative stage props.

St. Denis was a gifted dancer whose artistic creations demonstrated how to re-link dance with spiritualism at a time when Western dancers had generally cut themselves off from its religious and spiritual origins. She had studied and was deeply

inspired by non-Western and especially Indian civilization at a time when a tendency—much later dubbed as "Orientalism" by Edward Said—prompted her contemporaries to look upon non-Western people as inferior, backward and static or even weird and animalistic. Ruth St. Denis's relative open-mindedness was thus a fresh departure that helped free Western dance from its shackles, elevated it onto a higher plane and placed important and even profound facets of Indian culture before Western audiences.

### A Family Inheritance

Born January 20, 1879, Ruth St. Denis's uninhibited self-expression as a young girl and her life-long pioneering spirit was largely inspired by her nonconformist mother and inventor father. One of the first American women to venture to train and practice as a doctor, Ruth's mother, though deeply spiri-

**Flowers and incense:** (left) The set for Radha sincerely strived to emulate the atmosphere of a Hindu temple; (right) St. Denis in glittering costume

tual, was also progressive in her personal perspective and given to taking recourse to unconventional ways of thought and action.

Referring with pride to her parents, Ruth wrote fondly in her autobiography: "I feel that my urge for pushing forward into new fields of vision and scaling far mountains of thought derived largely from these two who were so near the pioneer stages of our American life. Father, not long from the Civil War, married mother as a doctor, a profession very little invaded by women. My mother was a woman about fifty years ahead of her time. She sensed life in an infinitely more intense way than any of the people in our neighborhood."

### The American Dance Scene

American popular dance in the late 19th and early 20th centuries was performed in vaudeville shows, where it was part of a medley of comic acts, live music and circus-style acts performed by men and animals. Having nothing to do with aesthetics, a higher purpose or refined thought, it was merely physical, resembling the antics of circus performers. In Ruth's own words: "To be a dancer in those days was like entering an artistic vacuum. Dancing consisted solely in the number of cartwheels, roll-overs and splits, kicks and other agilities that a dancer could achieve. The poetry and philosophy of the dance had yet to be born."

Ruth found inspiration in the positive developments in the performing arts wafting in from Europe, such as the Delsarte technique of acting. Stressing the link between an artist's inner emotional experience and gestures and movements derived from personal observation of human interactions, Delsarte's novel style won many followers in America.

### Artistic Awakening

Despite her high artistic ambitions, young Ruth was pushed by her family's financial straits in 1892 to launch herself into skirt dancing. This was a slightly risqué form of entertainment popular in dime museums and vaudeville shows. Luckily, she was soon able to move on to acting small parts in the famous theatre company of David Belasco and toured America and Europe.

Her final transformation from an actress into an artist with a vision, purpose and inspiration was sudden. The unlikely catalyst was an image of the Egyptian Goddess Isis in a cigarette poster that happened to catch her eyes in a Buffalo drugstore in 1904. Having finally awakened to the realization that her



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vocation lay in being a dancer with a mission and not a mere public entertainer, Ruth swiftly embarked on a new path. She determined to become a universal instrument of spiritual revelation and reflect man's eternal search for beauty and grandeur. However, what made Ruth St. Denis unique was that while her earlier contemporaries, such as Isadora Duncan, had drawn inspiration from ancient Greece, Ruth was pulled via Egyptian culture towards India.

Ironically, Ruth St. Denis became linked to India's culture and thought when she made a trip to that most flamboyant and extravagant centre of Western consumerism: New York's Coney Island. It was described in a 1904 publication as a pleasure resort unsurpassed "in the world in its elaborateness or ingenuity to wheedle away dimes and drowsiness." Coney Island was home to Luna Park, one of the most dazzling amusement or theme parks of its time.

In the summer of 1904, when Ruth visited Coney Island, Luna Park's major draw was the "Streets of Delhi," a grandiose effort to duplicate the pageantry and drama of Lord Curzon's Coronation, that Durbar held at Delhi in January 1903. It offered a grand spectacle of "gilded chariots and prancing horses, and trained elephants and dancing

girls, regiments of soldiers and an astonishing number of real Eastern people and animals in gay and stately trappings. The magnificence of the scene was such as to make those who witnessed it imagine they were in a genuine Oriental city." It was in this oriental wonderland that Ruth St. Denis first spotted the East Indian dancers, fakirs (mendicants), snake charmers and others from whom she drew inspiration for her Indian dances.

### Studying the East

Though fired by the "Streets of Delhi" to develop a vaudeville act made up of three Indian dances before a temple *murti* (enshrined form) of Radha, Indian dancing was initially not her goal. Her aim was to simply generate enough income to fund her Egypt-inspired dances by cashing in on the then current craze for Eastern exotica. But her plan changed when a turn towards Indian dancing started her on a journey to increase her knowledge about India, and especially Hindu culture. As she went about extracting information from the East Indian dancers she met in Luna Park, lapping up knowledge about India from books in the Indian section of Astor Library and seeking help from experts such as the extraordinary In-



dophile Edmund Russell, she became aware of the wonder that was India. She was particularly fascinated by the Hindu temple dancers, devadasis; and she felt she had hit upon a universal fundamental truth in the *Bhagavad Gita*'s declaration that inner peace and freedom from sorrow lay not in the bottomless whirlpool of worldly pleasures, but in shaking off the yoke of the flesh and performing one's duty with detachment.

The Indian dances that Ruth had contemplated as a commercial exercise turned into a project with a serious and long-term personal purpose. Eager to make her dance a vehicle to convey universal truths, she discarded her original concept. Instead of dancing before the *murti* of Radha, she would dance as Radha Herself, developing Her as a distinct entity in order to depict the human soul's eternal quest and yearning for union with the Infinite.

#### The Royalty and the Rabble

St. Denis now needed a place to perform. Fortunately, her sincere interest in India won her the support of Jal Bhumgarra, whose father was an affluent New York-based Indian importer of remarkable generosity. Bhumgarra invited Ruth for a private performance at the opening of one of his stores; in return, the Bhumgaras offered to let Ruth take her pick from their rich stock of oriental dress material, jewelry and Indian art products to create her dance costumes and stage props. The performance won the admiration of the Bhumgaras' guests, a special

audience that included dignitaries such as the Maharaja of Baroda.

Henry B. Harris, manager of the Hudson Theatre, financed a matinee of "Radha" for the benefit of seven other New York theatre managers in January 1906. But the managers' verdict was disappointing. "This kind of thing might go for Paris," they said, "but frankly, it will never do for New York." The genius of "Radha," and St. Denis' career, could well have died there; but in a stroke of luck, the sudden cancellation of a vaudeville performance created an unexpected emergency. Pushed to find a quick replacement, the manager decided to give Ruth's Hindu dancing a spot for one night.

She took up the offer, despite the incongruity of presenting a serious dance piece like "Radha" as an evening performance in a vaudeville theatre famed for its "Sunday Night Smoking Concerts." Ruth later recalled, "All questions of pride, the fitness of things, prestige, went completely by the board. Here was a job. It took some fortitude to expose the little Goddess to that Sunday-night, rollicking crowd. The air was filled with tobacco smoke. It was principally a men's audience, and I imagine that many of the turns that followed me were concerned with ribaldry, not art."

On that night, the audience joked, laughed and poked fun at the performance. Ruth kept her poise while the Hindu extras performing as priests stiffened under the ridicule. But then, something miraculous happened. In the words of Ted Shawn, who would later

become her pupil and husband, "When the curtain rose, there was much laughter and talk. But when the blue lights changed to amber, and the Goddess stepped from Her shrine, silence reigned until the curtain fell, when sincere and heavy applause broke forth. And so, even in the face of the most difficult obstacles and before the most unsympathetic audience that could have been found, 'Radha' triumphed completely in this, the first of over fifteen hundred performances of a production which marked an epoch in the world of dance, a work of art which is immortal."

"Radha's" success at the New York Theatre Roof Garden led to more bookings; still, the dance remained confined to the vaudeville circuit. It was squashed between a boxing show and a group of trained monkeys. Rather than being defeated by the surroundings, the spectacle began to change the audience of the vaudeville theater, attracting people from outside its usual circle. Reviewers wrote in the *Dancing Times* and *Dancers Today*, "In each audience were a few who responded unreservedly to the beauty of the appeal, who went out and told others of the rare vision they had seen. These, in turn, spread the good news, until the manager was surprised to find at each performance a stream of people of a type not usually seen at a vaudeville performance, who came just before Radha's appearance and hurried away as soon as the curtain fell, and who came again and again."

One such trespasser, Mrs Orlando Rou-

land, helped Ruth graduate to a better place. Convinced of the need to arrange a matinee for the show in a "proper uptown theatre," Mrs. Rouland gathered a group of about 25 like-minded ladies who contributed to book the Hudson Theater.

#### Her Career Takes Off

Dancing at the Hudson on March 22, 1906, proved a landmark in Ruth's career. In addition to presenting "Radha," she added three more Indian-inspired performances, "The Cobra," "The Incense" and "Nautch." Finally, her dances won conspicuous critical acclaim. "Radha" became the talk of the town.

Ruth's breakthrough in America paved the way for her passage to England in 1906. A performance before King Edward VII himself and his Queen, Alexandra, launched her career in London and set in motion social engagements that introduced her dancing to the upper crust of English society.

Ruth's matinees at the London Aldwych Theatre were attended by local and foreign celebrities. These included the flamboyant Maharaja of Kapurthala, who went backstage to congratulate Ruth. But Radha was not a commercial success in London, perhaps suffering from the British feeling of superiority over India's culture. The *Daily Telegraph*'s review decried the "austere symbolism" and suggested the dancer keep to the more physical moves (see review on opposite page).

The reception of Ruth's work in London would be much different later, when she returned to the British capital after a gloriously successful European tour. The citizens of the German Empire looked upon her work with special regard. Ruth wrote of the experience,

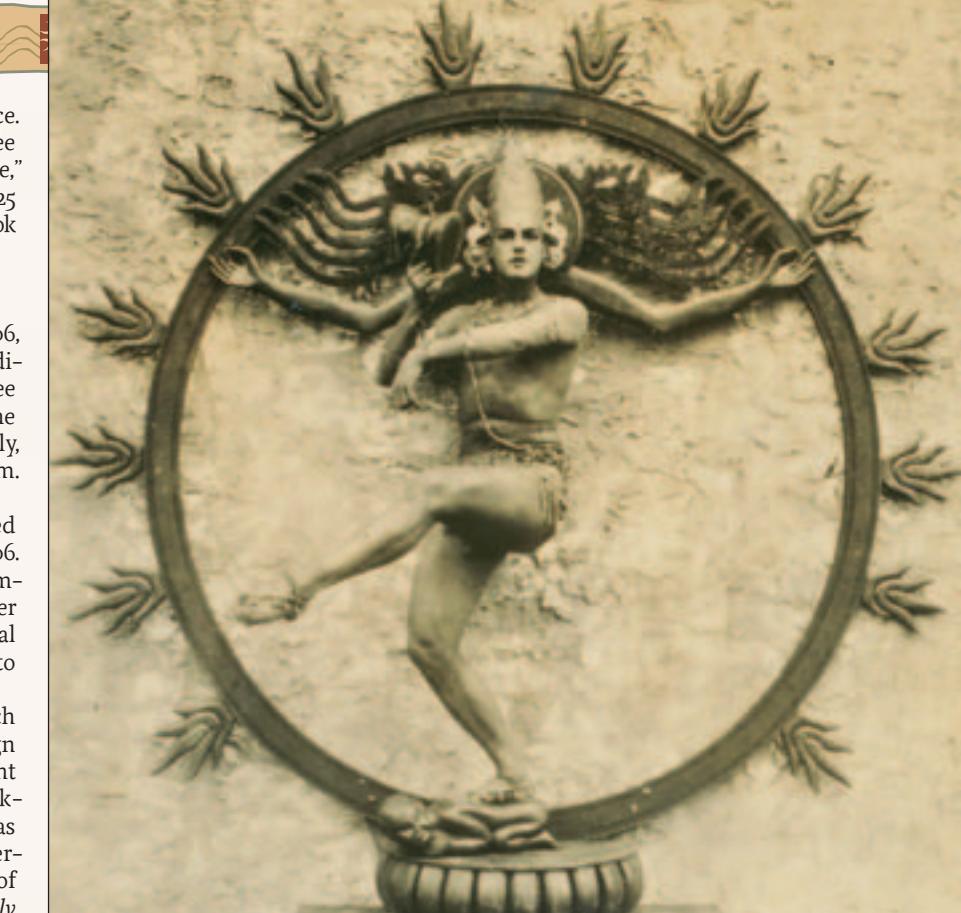
"I suddenly found I was not merely an entertainer, not merely a glamorous dancer or exotic novelty; I was an artist in the deepest sense of the word and the subject of earnest and critical analysis."

She returned to the US soon afterward, taking her Indian dances all over the country.

The general response of her countrymen was positive, and in her homeland she impressed art historian Dr. Ananda Coomaraswamy and Indian poetess Sarojini Naidu. She also met Indian Sufi mystic and musician Hazrat Inayat Khan, with whom she partnered for a tour. For the first time, the moves of her ascetic yoga undulated to the real ragas of India.

#### Denishaw and the Later Years

After 1911, the vogue for solo dancers on the professional stage died down, and Ruth St. Denis began to accept students to increase her income. Also, she began adding other performers to her touring productions. In 1914 she hired—and later married—Ted Shawn, a stage dancer with strong Delsartelean leanings who was 13 years her junior.



**Ted Shawn:** "The Cosmic Dance of Shiva," one of his greatest successes—a short clip of this dance can be seen by searching for "Ted Shawn Shiva" at [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com)

This new chapter in her life would have a lasting impact. The company Ruth St. Denis and the energetic Ted Shawn formed, called Denishawn, became the most influential school of modern dance in America in the first half of the 20th century.

In 1926, Ruth, now age 47, and the Denishawn company traveled to India. She was not shy about her "Indian" dance inventions. Boldly, she led performances not only in the metropolitan cities of Bombay, Calcutta and Madras but also in smaller cities and towns, including Karachi, Quetta, Lahore, Kanpur, Lucknow and Allahabad.

Presenting a wide array of Indian dances to Indians—Ted Shawn had created a performance called "The Cosmic Dance of Shiva"—could have resulted in rejection. Not being strictly based on any specific Indian style or school of dancing, they were inauthentic, despite the Indian inspiration. The music of these dances was even less Indian. But, as Uttara Corlawala reported, "There is no question that the Denishawn tour of India was successful and popular. It was extended considerably beyond their expectations, and they returned to cities they had already visited. [Ruth's] Dance of the Black and Gold Sari provoked virtual riots." Even Rabindranath Tagore was sufficiently impressed to request St. Denis to stay on and teach dance at Viswa-Bharati University in Shantiniketan.

Though their company (and marriage) folded in 1931, it produced a string of outstanding creative dancers that included Martha Graham, Doris Humphreys, Charles Weidman and Jack Cole.

#### Legacy

Evaluating the impact of her many tours, or "journeys," St. Denis wrote: "It took many years to realize the full effect of the pioneering work on these journeys. I have been told by Hindus that the value of these early tours, when their Hindu culture was introduced through the dance, can scarcely be overestimated. Until the appearance of 'Radha,' our national conception of Oriental dancing brought images of the Midway Plaisance at the 1893 Chicago Fair, which was not discussed in polite society. And in literature the Oriental, be he Indian, Japanese or Chinese, was, as a general rule, the villain of the piece. We were not only crude but vicious in our attitudes towards the Orient, and with infinite gratitude I can say very humbly that I believe these early dances of mine helped to lay the groundwork for a better appreciation of Eastern culture and beauty. The rhythms, the costuming, and the constant suggestions of Oriental philosophy implicit in the performance, caused discussions and research that have subtly penetrated the whole of America."

## Braving British Skepticism

*The review from The Telegraph, both praiseful and critical of "Radha" in London, brings to life how a British gentleman felt when contemplating the unexpected depths of the East as depicted in Ruth St. Denis' performance. As re-published by the New York Times, 1906.*

**A**T ONE MOMENT WE SEE THE PURDAH dividing to let a slim figure come out to light the incense bowls; at another moment we are in a street with jugglers, merchants, water-carriers, each busily occupied with their respective trades. Now we are in the gorgeous palace of some raja with the *nautch* girl pirouetting before the stately throne; and anon we are in a densely matted jungle, where in a cleared space a Hindu saint or "yogi" is renouncing in his own fashion the world.

And then comes a still more grandiose spectacle, in which the service of a temple

is performed before our eyes, and Radha, wife of Krishna, instructs her priests in the great lessons of self-sacrifice.

It was a spectacle full of symbolism and suggestion, replete with mystical significance, which, over and over again, deliberately sacrificed charm to accuracy and beauty to unflinching realism.

Perhaps if a criticism may be passed on it, it was too symbolic. The exact meaning of the rapt ecstasy of a "yogi" and his solemn acts of abnegation might be lost to an occidental audience; and the dance of the five senses, where Radha abjures them all to achieve the peace of true saintship, might fail to carry its message to men impervious to allegory and ignorant of Nirvana. The most popular, perhaps, was the *nautch* dance in the palace, because the lithe gyrations and sudden abrupt turns and twists needed no commentary or interpretation.

We have rarely seen anything which more clearly suggests the languorous passion and sentiment of the Indian peninsula. There is much in the evening's entertainment which is curiously interesting, a keen esoteric flavor of barbaric crudity and sensuousness, aptly symbolized by the acrid smell of those fumes of incense which cling to the walls of the theatre like a strange and penetrating atmosphere.

**REALLY ORIENTAL  
IS RUTH ST. DENIS**  
American Girl's Hindu Dances  
Described as Sacrificing Charm  
to Unflinching Realism.  
**IS AUSTERELY SYMBOLIC**  
But the Extraordinary Grace and Sincerity of the Dancer Is Recognized by London Critics.

# YOGA

## A Youthful Primer About Hinduism's Eight-Limbed System of Meditation and Spiritual Striving

FROM THE TEACHINGS OF SATGURU SIVAYA SUBRAMUNIYASWAMI



Today's popular concept of yoga equates it with haṭha yoga and the practice of the haṭha yoga āsanas, or postures. Many who practice such yoga do so solely for health benefits. However, others pursue yoga, in a deeper sense, in hopes of reaping the spiritual benefits it offers. It is to these spiritual seekers who have higher consciousness as the goal of their yoga that this Educational Insight is directed. Here we describe the path called rāja yoga, the regal (rāja) means to enlightenment, a classical, meditative system that is one among the numerous yogas practiced in Hinduism. Technically, it is termed ashṭāṅga (eight-limbed) yoga, a name coined by Sage Patanjali, because it consists of eight stages, represented in our illustrations of the village tree with eight limbs. These stages are: yama (restraint), niyama (observance), āsana (seat or posture), prāṇāyāma (mastering life force), pratyāhāra (withdrawal), dhāraṇā (concentration), dhyāna (meditation) and samādhi (contemplation and God Realization). It is worth noting that yama (the restraints) and niyama (the observances) precede āsana (haṭha yoga postures), but they are omitted in most yoga classes today. That is unfortunate, as this ethical basis is of utmost importance. We can liken these eight limbs to a tall building. The yamas are the first part of the foundation, like the steel; and the niyamas are the second part, like the cement. Together they provide the support a skyscraper needs to stand. Āsana, prāṇāyāma and pratyāhāra are like the lower floors, dhāraṇā and dhyāna are the middle ones, and samādhi is the topmost floor, the stratum of realization and illumination.

SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI

# 1 Yama: Restraints

**I**t is true that bliss comes from meditation, and it is true that higher consciousness is the heritage of all mankind. However, the ten restraints and their corresponding practices are necessary to maintain bliss consciousness, as well as all of the good feelings toward oneself and others attainable in any incarnation. These restraints and practices build character. Character is the foundation for spiritual unfoldment.

The platform of character must be built within our lifestyle to maintain the total contentment needed to persevere on the path. The great rishis saw the frailty of human nature and gave these guidelines, or disciplines, to make it strong. They said, "Strive!" Let's strive to not hurt others, to be truthful and honor all the rest of the virtues they outlined.

The twenty restraints and observances are the first two of the eight limbs of *ashtāṅga* yoga, constituting Hinduism's fundamental ethical code. Because it is brief, the entire code can be easily memorized and reviewed daily at the family meetings in each home. The yamas and niyamas are cited in numerous scriptures, including the *Śāṇḍilya* and *Varāha Upanishads*, the *Hatha Yoga Pradīpikā* by Gorakshanatha, the *Tirumantiram* of Rishi Tirumular and the *Yoga Sūtras* of Sage Patanjali. All of these ancient texts list ten yamas and ten niyamas, with the exception of Patanjali's classic work, which lists just five of each. Patanjali lists the yamas as: *ahimsā*, *satya*, *asteya*, *brahmacharya* and *aparigraha* (noncovetousness); and the niyamas as: *śaucha*, *santosha*, *tapas*, *svādhyāya* (self-reflection, scriptural study) and *īśvarapranidhāna* (worship).

Each discipline focuses on a different aspect of human nature, its strengths and weaknesses. Taken as a sum total, they encompass the whole of human experience and spirituality. You may do well in upholding some of these but not so well in others. That is to be expected. That defines the *sādhana*, therefore, to be perfected.

The ten yamas are: 1) *ahimsā*, "noninjury," not harming others by thought, word or deed; 2) *satya*, "truth-



fulness," refraining from lying and betraying promises; 3) *asteya*, "nonstealing," neither stealing nor coveting nor entering into debt; 4) *brahmacharya*, "divine conduct," controlling lust by remaining celibate when single, leading to faithfulness in marriage; 5) *kshamā*, "patience," restraining intolerance with people and impatience with circumstances; 6) *dhṛiti*, "steadfastness," overcoming nonperseverance, fear, indecision, inconstancy and changeableness; 7) *dayā*, "compassion," conquering callous, cruel and insensitive feelings toward all beings; 8) *ārjava*, "honesty, straightforwardness," renouncing deception and wrongdoing; 9) *mitāhāra*, "moderate appetite," neither eating too much nor consuming meat, fish, fowl or eggs; 10) *śaucha*, "purity," avoiding impurity in body, mind and speech.

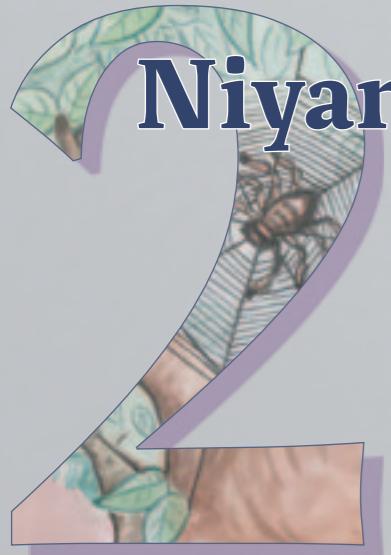
*As her brother watches protectively, a young girl swings on a vine, restrained from falling as surely as the moral restraints of avoiding misdeeds keep us from falling from the yoga path. Like the silent witness within, a family of owls watches wisely from their nest in the tree.*

**"Restraint." Virtuous and moral living, which brings purity of mind, freedom from anger, jealousy and subconscious confusion which would inhibit the process of meditation.**

**"Yama is abstention from harming others, from falsehood, from theft, from incontinence and from greed."**

*Sage Patanjali, II, Sūtra 30*

Sutra translations are from *How to Know God, The Yoga Aphorisms of Patanjali* by Swami Prabhavananda and Christopher Isherwood, copyright 1953 by the Vedanta Society of Southern California



**"Observance." Religious practices which cultivate the qualities of the higher nature, such as devotion, cognition, humility and contentment—giving the refinement of character and control of mind needed to follow spiritual disciplines and ultimately plunge into samādhi.**

**"The niyamas are purity, contentment, austerity, study and devotion to God."**

*Sage Patanjali, II, Sūtra 32*

## Niyama: Observances

The niyamas are 1) hrī, "remorse," being modest and showing shame for misdeeds; 2) santosha, "contentment," seeking joy and serenity in life; 3) dāna, "giving," tithing and giving generously without thought of reward; 4) āstikya, "faith," believing firmly in God, Gods, guru and the path to enlightenment; 5) Īśvarapūjana, "worship of the Lord," the cultivation of devotion through daily worship and meditation; 6) siddhānta śravaṇa, "scriptural listening," studying the teachings and listening to the wise of one's lineage; 7) mati, "cognition," developing a spiritual will and intellect with the guru's guidance; 8) vrata, "sacred vows," fulfilling religious vows, rules and observances faithfully; 9) japa, "recitation," chanting mantras daily; 10) tapas, "austerity," performing sādhana, penance, tapas and sacrifice.

In comparing the yamas to the niyamas, we find the restraint of noninjury, ahimsā, makes it possible to practice hrī, remorse. Truthfulness brings on the state of santosha, contentment. And the third yama, asteya, nonstealing, must be perfected before the third niyama, giving without any thought of reward, is even possible. Sexual purity brings faith in God, Gods and guru. Kshamā, patience, is the foundation for Īśvarapūjana, worship, as is dhṛiti, steadfastness, the foundation for siddhānta śravaṇa. The yama of dayā, compassion, definitely brings mati, cognition. Ārjava, honesty—renouncing deception and all wrongdoing—is the foundation for vrata, taking sacred vows and faithfully fulfilling them. Mitāhāra, moderate appetite, is where yoga begins, and vegetarianism is essential before the practice of japa, recitation of holy mantras, can reap its true benefit in one's life. Śaucha, purity in body, mind and speech, is the foundation and the protection for all austerities.

The yamas and niyamas and their function in our life can be likened to a chariot pulled by ten horses. The passenger inside the chariot is your soul. The chariot itself represents your physical, astral and mental bodies. The driver of the chariot is your external ego, your personal will. The wheels are your divine energies. The niyamas,



or spiritual practices, represent the spirited horses, named Hrī, Santosha, Dāna, Āstikya, Īśvarapūjana, Siddhānta Śravaṇa, Mati, Vrata, Japa, and Tapas. The yamas, or restraints, are the reins, called Ahimsā, Satya, Asteya, Brahmacharya, Kshamā, Dhṛiti, Dayā, Ārjava, Mitāhāra and Śaucha. By holding tight to the reins, the charioteer, your will, guides the strong horses so they can run forward swiftly and gallantly as a dynamic unit. So, as we restrain the lower, instinctive qualities through upholding the yamas, the soul moves forward to its destination in the state of santosha. Santosha, peace, is the eternal satisfaction of the soul. At the deepest level, the soul is always in the state of santosha. Therefore, hold tight the reins.

*Reaching the second limb, the girl watches a devotee far below, offering flowers and loving devotion to Lord Ganesha, enshrined at the foot of the banyan. The youth wonders if the spider in its web also knows of the ten observances and if he has a yoga of his own to practice.*

# 3 Āsana:

**"Seat or posture." A sound body is needed for success in meditation.**

**This is attained through haṭha yoga, the postures of which balance the energies of mind and body, promoting health and serenity.**

**"Āsana is to be seated in a position which is firm but relaxed. Āsana becomes firm and relaxed through control of the natural tendencies of the body, and through meditation on the Infinite."**

*Sage Patanjali, II, Sūtras 46–47*

## Posture

**S**uccess in meditation requires the ability to sit in a comfortable posture, for long periods, without moving. Proper posture is necessary because the very simple act of equalizing the weight and having it held up by the spine causes you to lose body consciousness. Sit up nice and straight with the spine erect and the head balanced at the top of the spine.

By sitting up straight, with the spine erect, the energies of the physical body are transmuted. Posture is important, especially as meditation deepens and lengthens. With the spine erect and the head balanced at the top of the spine, the life force is quickened and intensified as energies flood freely through the nerve system. In a position such as this, we cannot become worried, fretful, depressed or sleepy during our meditation. Learn to sit dynamically, relaxed and yet poised.

Inwardly observe this posture and adjust the body to be poised and comfortable. Feel the muscles, bones and the nerve system. This posture is possible sitting in a chair, on a cushion, or on your knees. Ideally, a competent meditator will be able to cross the legs for meditation, either in full or half lotus. The hands are held in the lap, the right hand resting on the left, tips of the thumbs touching softly. In all cases, the posture should be natural and easy, and not cause discomfort, which is distracting during meditation. Look inwardly at the currents of the body. Observe their flow.

If you just sit without moving, and breathe, the inner nerve system of the body of your psyche, your soul, begins to work on the subconscious, to mold it like clay. Awareness is loosened from limited concepts and made free to move vibrantly and buoyantly into the inner depths where peace and bliss remain undisturbed for centuries.

The meditative poses are part of a larger system called haṭha yoga, a system of bodily postures, or āsanas, created as a method for the yogi practicing yoga for long hours each day, performing japa and meditation, to exercise and keep the physical body healthy so that his meditations



could continue uninhibited by disease or weakness. The purpose of haṭha yoga today again is the same—to keep the physical body, emotional body, astral body and mental body harmonious, healthy and happy so that awareness can soar within to the heights of divine realization. In our haṭha yoga we work with color, we work with sound and with the subtle emotions and feelings of the body when going from one āsana to another. Each āsana carefully executed, with regulated breathing, the visualization of color and the hearing of the inner sound, slowly unties the knotted vāsanās within the subconscious mind and releases awareness from there to mountaintop consciousness.

*Younger brother has reached the third branch, where he deftly assumes a yoga posture designed to fine-tune his nervous system, balance his energies and prepare him for meditation. A peacock poses proudly nearby, demonstrating the poise and natural relaxation the boy yogi is striving for.*

# Prāṇāyāma:

## Breath Control

**T**he entire nerve system of the physical body and the functions of breath have to be at a certain rhythm in order for awareness to remain poised like a hummingbird over a flower. Now, since the physical body and our breath have never really been disciplined in any way, we have to begin by breathing rhythmically and diaphragmatically, so that we breathe out the same number of counts as we breathe in. After we do this over a long period of time—and you can start now—the body becomes trained, the external nerve system becomes trained, responds, and awareness is held at attention.

The first observation you may have when thus seated for meditation is that thoughts are racing through the mind substance. You may become aware of many, many thoughts. Also, the breath may be irregular. Therefore, the next step is to transmute the energies from the intellectual area of the mind through proper breathing, in just the same way as the proper attitude, preparation and posture transmuted the physical-instinctive energies. Through regulation of the breath, thoughts are stilled and awareness moves into an area of the mind which does not think, but conceives and intuits.

There are vast and powerful systems of breathing that can stimulate the mind, sometimes to excess. Deep meditation requires only that the breath be systematically slowed or lengthened. This happens naturally as we go within, but can be encouraged by a simple method of breathing called kalibasa in Shūm, my language of meditation. During kalibasa, the breath is counted: nine counts as we inhale, hold one count, nine counts as we exhale, hold one count. The length of the beats or the rhythm of the breath will slow as the meditation is sustained, until we are counting to the beat of the heart.

Controlling the breath is the same as controlling

**"Harnessing prāṇa." Breath control, which quiets the chitta and balances the idā and piṅgalā currents within the spine. The science of controlling prāṇa through breathing techniques in which the lengths of inhalation, retention and exhalation are modulated. Prāṇāyāma prepares the mind for deep meditation.**

**"After mastering posture, one must practice control of the prāṇa by regulating the motions of inhalation and exhalation."**

*Sage Patanjali, II, Sūtra 49*



awareness. They go hand in hand. During meditation, the breath, the heartbeat, metabolism—it all slows down, just like in sleep. Therefore, the practice of prāṇāyāma and regulation of the breath, the prāṇas, the currents of the body, should really be mastered first. We need this preparation of the physical body so that the physical and emotional bodies behave themselves while you are in a deep state of meditation.

You can spend hours or years working with the breath. Find a good teacher first, one who keeps it simple and gentle. You don't need to strain. Start simply by slowing the breath down. Breathe by moving the diaphragm instead of the chest. This is how children breathe, you know. So, be a child. If you learn to control the breath, you can be master of your awareness.

*Sister takes a seat on the fourth branch, holding her hands in the traditional way to direct the breath through one nostril and the next, as she strives to control the pranas of the body. Two birds pluck ripe berries nearby, too busy making a living to bother with her yogic efforts.*

# Pratyāhāra: 5

**"Withdrawal." The practice of withdrawing consciousness from the physical senses first, such as not hearing noise while meditating, then progressively receding from emotions, intellect and eventually from individual consciousness itself in order to merge into the Universal.**

**"When the mind is withdrawn from sense objects, the sense organs also withdraw themselves from their respective objects and thus are said to imitate the mind. Then arises complete mastery over the senses."**

*Sage Patanjali, II, Sūtra 54*

## Withdrawal

Here is a step-by-step system of *pratyāhāra* that you can use to begin each meditation for the rest of your life. Simply sit, quiet the mind, and feel the warmth of the body. Feel the natural warmth in the feet, in the legs, in the head, in the neck, in the hands and face. Simply sit and be aware of that warmth. Feel the glow of the body. This is very easy, because the physical body is what many of us are most aware of. Take five or ten minutes to do this. There's no hurry.

The second step is to feel the nerve currents of the body. Start with the feeling of the hands, thumbs touching, resting on your lap. Feel the life force going through these nerves, energizing the body. Try to sense the even more subtle nerves that extend out and around the body about three or four feet. This may take some time. When you have located some of these nerves, feel the energy within them. Tune into the currents of life force as they flow through these nerves.

The third step takes us deeper inside, as we become dynamically aware in the spine. Feel the power within the spine, the powerhouse of energy that feeds out to the external nerves and muscles. Visualize the spine in your mind's eye. See it as a hollow tube or channel through which life energies flow. Feel it with your inner feelings. It's there, subtle and silent, yet totally intense.

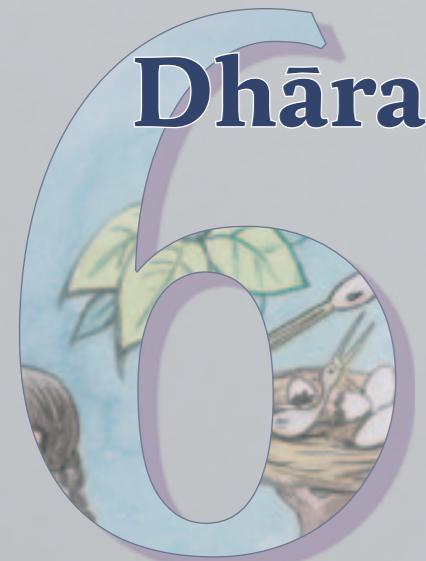
The fourth step is to draw the energy from the five senses inward in a systematic way. On the first inbreath, bring awareness into the left leg, all the way to the toes, and on the outbreath slowly withdraw the energy from that leg into the spine. Repeat with the right leg, left arm (all the way to the fingertips), right arm and finally the torso.

The fifth step comes as we plunge aware-



ness into the essence, the center of this energy in the head and spine. This requires great discipline and exacting control to bring awareness to the point of being aware of itself. The state of being totally aware that we are aware is called *kaif*. It is pure awareness, not aware of any object, feeling or thought. Simply sit in a state of pure consciousness. Go into the physical forces that flood, day and night, through the spine and body. Then go into the energy of that, deeper into the vast inner space of that, into the essence of that, into the that of that, and into the that of that. Once you are thus centered within yourself, you are ready to pursue a meditation, a mantra or a deep philosophical question. Coming out of meditation, we perform this process in reverse.

*Brother finds a place on the fifth branch, where he sits and carefully ties a cloth band to hold his knees in place. It is a traditional way to keep the body in place while working to withdraw from the five senses and go deep within. He is too deep to notice the bee hive buzzing below. Below are two tortoises. One practices his own version of withdrawal, retracting his head and limbs into his protective shell.*



# Dhāraṇā:

**"Concentration." Focusing the mind on a single object or line of thought, not allowing it to wander. The guiding of the flow of consciousness. When concentration is sustained long enough and deeply enough, meditation naturally follows.**

**"Concentration upon a single object may reach four stages: examination, discrimination, joyful peace and simple awareness of individuality.**

*Sage Patanjali, I, Sūtra 17*

## Concentration

When we have brought awareness to attention, we automatically move into the next step, concentration. The hummingbird, poised over the flower, held at attention, begins to look at the flower, to concentrate on it, to study it, to muse about it, not to be distracted by another flower—that is, then, awareness moving. Awareness distracted, here, is awareness simply moving to another flower, or moving to another area of the mind.

Give up the idea that thoughts come in and out of your mind like visitors come in and out of your house. Hold to the idea that it is awareness that moves, rather than the thoughts that move. Look at awareness as a yo-yo at the end of a string. The string is hooked to the very core of energy itself, and awareness flows out and it flows in. Awareness might flow out toward a tree and in again, and then out toward a flower and then in again, and down toward the ground and then in again. This wonderful yo-yo of awareness—that is a good concept to grasp in order to become more acquainted with awareness. Awareness held at attention can then come into the next vibratory rate and concentrate.

Here is a simple concentration exercise. Take a flower and place it in front of you. Breathe deeply as you sit before it. Simply look at it. Don't stare at it and strain your eyes. Simply become aware of it. Each time awareness moves to some other area of the mind, with your willpower move awareness back and become aware of the flower again. Keep doing this until you are simply aware of the flower and not aware of your body or your breath. Then begin to concentrate on the flower. That is the second step. Think about the flower. Move into the area of the mind where all flowers exist in all phases of manifestation, and concentrate on the flower. Move from one area to another—to where all stems exist, to the stem of that particular flower, to the root that that particular flower came from, and to the seed. Con-



centrate, concentrate, concentrate on the flower. This is what concentration is—remaining in the thought area of the particular item that you are aware of and flowing through the different color and sound vibrations of the thoughts. How does it work? The powers of concentration—it is only a name. Actually, what is happening is you are flowing awareness through the area of the mind which contains the elements which actually made that particular flower, and you are perceiving how all those elements came together. If you can concentrate sufficiently to have fifty thoughts about the flower without a single thought about anything else, you will have mastered dhāraṇa.

*Climbing even higher, the girl sits before a small oil lamp. She is focusing, concentrating, on the flame, thinking of nothing else, not letting her mind wander to any other object, idea, sensation or memory. Behind her, a heron is concentrating on the full-time job of feeding its newly hatched fledglings.*



## Dhyāna:

**"Meditation." A quiet, alert, powerfully concentrated state wherein new knowledge and insight pour into the field of consciousness. This state is possible once the subconscious mind has been cleared and quieted.**

**"Meditation is an unbroken flow of thought toward the object of concentration."**

*Sage Patanjali, III, Sūtra 2*

## Meditation

**A**fter we are able to hold awareness hovering over that which we are concentrating upon, we come into great powers of observation. We are able to look into and almost through that which we are concentrating upon and observe its various parts and particles, its action and its reaction, because we are not distracted. Even observation in daily life, as a result of regular participation in the practice of concentration, comes naturally. We are able to see more, hear more, feel more. Our senses are more keen and alive. Observation is so necessary to cultivate, to bring awareness fully into the fullness of meditation.

This leads us then into our very next step, meditation. Meditation and concentration are practically the same thing, though meditation is simply a more intense state of concentration. The state of meditation is careful, close scrutiny of the individual elements and energies which make up that flower. You are scrutinizing the inner layers of the mind, of how a flower grows, how the seed is formed. You are observing it so keenly that you have forgotten that you are a physical body, that you are an emotional unit, that you are breathing. You are in the area of mind where that flower exists, and the bush that it came from, and the roots and the seed and all phases of manifestation, all at the same time. And you are seeing it as it actually is in that area of the mind where the flower is that you first put awareness at attention upon, then began to concentrate upon. Then you are meditating on the actual inner area of the mind where, in all stages of manifestation, that particular species actually is within the mind.

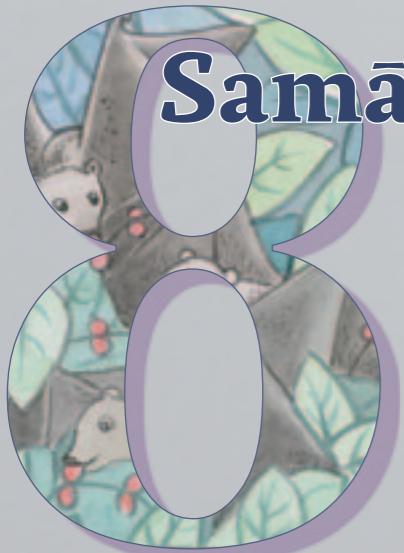
When you are experiencing the totality of the moment, you are not aware of the past, nor are you aware of the future or anything within the externalities of the mind. You are aware of the *ākāśa*, the primal substance of the superconsciousness of the mind. You are able to have a continuity of intuitive findings



within it and gain much knowledge from within yourself.

As you sit to meditate, awareness may wander into past memories or future happenings. It may be distracted by the senses, by a sound or by a feeling of discomfort in the body. This is natural in the early stages. Gently bring awareness back to your point of concentration. Don't criticize awareness for wandering, for that is yet another distraction. Distractions will disappear if you become intensely interested and involved in your meditation. In such a state you won't even feel the physical body. You have gone to a movie, read a book or sat working on a project on your computer that was so engrossing, you only later discovered your foot had fallen asleep for a half hour because it was in an awkward position. Similarly, once we are totally conscious on the inside, we will never be distracted by the physical body or the outside.

*On reaching the seventh branch, the boy sits in full lotus posture, focuses his gaze on the tip of his nose and holds his thumbs and index fingers together to direct the body's pranas. He is striving for the state of meditation. Two chimps play nearby, uncontrolled and uncontrollable, a reminder of the monkey-like mind that jumps from place to place.*



**"Union." Sameness, contemplation, realization. The state of true yoga, in which the meditator and the object of meditation are one.**

**"When, in meditation, the true nature of the object shines forth, not distorted by the mind of the perceiver, that is samādhi."**

*Sage Patanjali, III, Sūtra 3*

## Samādhi: Union

Out of meditation, we come into contemplation. Contemplation is concentrating so deeply in the inner areas of the mind in which that flower and the species of it and the seed of it and all exist. We go deeper, deeper, deeper within, into the energy and the life within the cells of the flower, and we find that the energy and the life within the cells of the flower is the same as the energy within us, and we are in contemplation upon energy itself. We see the energy as light. We might see the light within our head, if we have a slight body consciousness. In a state of contemplation, we might not even be conscious of light itself, for you are only conscious of light if you have a slight consciousness of darkness. Otherwise, it is just your natural state, and you are in a deep reverie. In a state of contemplation, you are so intently alive, you can't move. That's why you sit so quietly. This is *savikalpa samādhi* ("union with form or seed"), identification or oneness with the essence of an object. Its highest form is the realization of the primal substratum or pure consciousness, *Satchidānanda*.

This, then, leads to the very deepest *samādhi*, where we almost, in a sense, go within one atom of that energy and move into the primal source of all. There's really nothing that you can say about it, because you cannot cast that concept of the Self, or that depth of *samādhi*, you cannot cast it out in words. You cannot throw it out in a concept, because there are no areas of the mind in which the Self exists, and yet, but for the Self, the mind, consciousness, would not exist. You have to realize It to know It; and after you realize It, you know It; and before you realize It, you want It; and after you realize It, you don't want It. You have lost something. You have lost your goal for Self Realization, because you've got it. This is *nirvikalpa samādhi* ("union without form or seed"), identification with the Self, in which all modes of



consciousness are transcended and Absolute Reality, *Paraśiva*, beyond time, form and space, is experienced. This brings in its aftermath a complete transformation of consciousness.

The *Chandogya Upanishad* expresses it so beautifully: "The Self is below, above, behind, before, to the right, to the left. I am all this. One who knows, meditates upon and realizes the truth of the Self—such a one delights in the Self, revels in the Self, rejoices in the Self. He becomes master of himself and master of all the worlds. Slaves are they who know not this truth." (7.25.2 *The Upanishads*, Prabhavananda and Manchester, p. 118).

*At last, brother and sister reach the top of the banyan, and sit together in silent bliss. Their efforts have brought them to a oneness with the universe as they dive deeply within to discover they are that universe, they are the Self within each other, and within all. A family of bats feeds among the leaves of the tree. Just as bats forage while others sleep, so too do our young yogis seek a greater consciousness which remains asleep in most others.*

# The Magic of Silk...

## At What Cost?

### The Innocence of Insect Husbandry Is Questioned

**W**HO CAN DENY THE BEAUTY OF A well woven piece of silk fabric or the intricately embroidered designs that skilled hands have created from silk thread, each triangular fiber refracting the light to produce a natural shimmer? Or the fact that silk garments are uniquely cool in warm weather, yet provide insulation in the cold? And what about silk clothing's venerable place in Asian culture? Doesn't every Indian bride dream of a silken sari? The sheer magic of its production from the insect realm to fabric is fascinating. For most of us, silk is appealing if not enthralling.

There's another side of silk, though, one which people concerned about upholding the principle of ahimsa (nonviolence) must consider: All the wondrous qualities of silk come at the price of literally billions of silkworms, all of whom are raised and killed in order to harvest their valuable cocoons.

For people trying to live as compassionate a life as possible, there are alternatives. So-called "ahimsa silk" or "peace silk" is made only from cocoons discarded after the moth has naturally emerged. It is marketed and sold by a small number of companies and is

an option which some Hindus may find acceptable. Even here though, doubts are justly raised about whether such silk should be called "nonviolent."

Animal rights groups recommend synthetic fibers as a more compassionate option over all silks. But synthetic textiles are produced from chemicals and petroleum derivatives; so—given all that we now know about fossil fuels' role in both global climate change and environmental pollution—are synthetic fibers really any less violent?

#### History

Silk farming, called sericulture, is nearly as old as human civilization itself. Tradition says that the fourteen-year-old Chinese queen Hsi-Ling-Shih observed the remarkable fast growth of silkworms in the wild and brought a cocoon back to the palace. One day she accidentally dropped a discarded cocoon into her tea. When she removed it, the cocoon began unravelling and the idea for silk fabric blossomed.

Archeological evidence for the antiquity of silk production winds back to this same era. In modern Shanxi province, a silk cocoon, cut

in half by a knife and dated to 3000–5000 BCE, has been discovered. The moth species was *Bombyx mori*, the one used in most silk production today.

Across the Himalayas, use of silk in India also dates back to antiquity. References in the *Rig Veda* and *Mahabharata* refer to silk fabric being used for clothing, while the *Ramayana* mentions Sita's receiving silken vestments as gifts.

Archeologists have discovered wild silk threads at Harappa and Chanhudaro dating back to 2450–2000 BCE. The species used in the production of the threads were *Antherea mylitta* (the modern day Tussar silk moth) and the Eri silk moth. It is presumed their cocoons were collected from the wild. The Chinese considered silk production a state secret, a breach of which carried the death penalty. But around 550 ce, live cocoons were smuggled into Central Asia. The Arabs brought sericulture to Africa and Europe 100 years later. By 1450, the silk industry was booming in Europe. Later the European industry declined and the center of the silk cultivation shifted back to the Orient, with China in the lead today. (See our timeline.)

Today silk production accounts for less than 0.2% of total global textile output, a mere 3 ounces of silk for every 100 pounds of cloth. Though production is spread out over 60 countries, 90% comes from Asia and about 70% from China, where the industry employs one million people. Second-place producer India employs 700,000 households. The largest silk importing and consuming nation is India, where the majority of silk is woven into saris.

#### Conventional Silk Production

The dominant species used in sericulture is today, as it was thousands of years ago, *Bombyx mori*. Though once a wild animal (*Bombyx mandarina* is suspected to be the ancestor of the domesticated *Bombyx mori*), at this point it is entirely a domesticated species, blind and incapable of flight.

The silk production process begins with tiny eggs, laid by the few female silk moths that have been allowed to emerge from their cocoons. Each lays between 200–500 eggs.

In about seven days, the eggs hatch into 3mm-long larva. For several weeks the larva are fed around the clock on chopped mulber-

ry leaves during which time they molt several times and grow to about 9cm in length. Over this period the silkworm increases in weight about 10,000 times.

When they are ready to spin their cocoons,

the worms are transferred to a fresh set of bamboo trays. Silkworms possess a pair of specially modified salivary glands called sericteries, which are used for the production of a clear, viscous, proteinaceous fluid that



**Harvesting nature for luxury:** top left: the richly colored Tussah moth, which is used to produce "wild silk." "Ahimsa silk" is made from its discarded cocoons after the moth has hatched naturally. above: The most expensive silk sari in the world, made by the prestigious Chennai Silk textile house in Tamil Nadu, uses inset jewels that detail a famous Ravi Varma painting. It is priced at US \$100,000. India is the world's largest consumer of silk goods, with saris topping the list retail silk products.



# The Making of Silk

The domesticated female *Bombyx mori* moth, whose offspring produce over 90% of the world's silk, cannot fly, never sees the light of day, is bred, lays eggs once then dies. Her larval offspring are pricked, boiled or baked to death in their cocoons before they mature. The raw silk strands unraveled from these cocoons eventually becomes the silk you wear. The process is 5,000 years old, if not older. Today one can find silk being made on a small scale, such as in Thailand villages, and mass-produced on huge silkworm farms and factories that process hundreds of thousands of cocoons each month, such as in China. At the top of silk's consumption ladder are Indian Hindus who buy silk saris. Increasingly, however, Indian ladies with compassionate hearts are calling for an end to silk.



1 The female silk moth is raised and bred. She lays her eggs inside an enclosure and then dies.



2 The freshly hatched larvae are barely 3mm long.



3 Also called silkworms, they are placed in baskets of mulberry leaves. Baskets are kept in an exceptionally clean environment.



4 Workers may not smoke, make noise, eat garlic or chicory or do anything to upset the sensitive larvae, who eat voraciously.



5 As they grow and make waste in one basket, they are moved by hand to clean baskets with fresh leaves. Heads down, they eat continuously for about 20 days and grow to be about 9 cm long.



6 After about 22 days, they stop eating and raise their heads, signaling their readiness to spin cocoons.



7 Workers carefully place the worms in specially designed baskets with compartments that keep the cocoons separate and uniform.



8 From a pair of modified salivary glands, the worms secrete a viscous fluid that hardens into a filament on contact with air.



9 Spinning round and round in a figure eight, they cocoon themselves with a single filament that will ultimately be 600 to 1000 meters long.



10 The silkworms spin for three or four days, then stop and turn into pupae to begin the magical transformation into moths.



11 To prevent them from emerging and thus damaging the cocoons, the pupae are pricked to death, boiled or baked alive inside the cocoons.



12 Skilled hands find the ends of the single filament of individual cocoons, twist them together to form a single thread and pass it to a reel.



13 The diameter of the thread depends on how many filaments are twisted and reeled together.



14 Floated in hot water to loosen the viscous filament, cocoons unroll as the filament is reeled up. Shown here is a fine-grade, five-strand thread.



15 Workers stop the reeling when a single cocoon is finished, find the end of another cocoon's filament, attach it to the thread and resume reeling.



16 The silk thread is then hung and readied for bleaching, dying and weaving.



is forced through openings called spinnerets on the mouthpart of the larva. As the fluid comes into contact with the air, it hardens into thread which the worm uses to spin the cocoon. The diameter of the spinneret determines the thickness of the thread, which emerges as a long, continuous filament.

After several days in the cocoon, it is harvest time. To unravel the thread as one single strand, the cocoon must be harvested before the pupa matures and emerges as a moth. If the moth naturally emerges from the cocoon, it cuts the filament, just as you might take a pair of scissors and cut up a ball of yarn.

To prevent this, the pupae are killed by a process euphemistically called "stifling." This is generally done by boiling, steaming or baking. If water or steam is used, the cocoon must be worked immediately; otherwise, the pupae inside will putrefy during storage and contaminate the filament. If baked and dried, the cocoons can be stored for later use.

Once this is done, the end of the silk thread is located and the entire cocoon unwound, either mechanically or by hand. Each cocoon produces 600 to 900 meters of filament. Five to eight filaments are reeled together to make a single thread for textile production.

By some accounts, 50,000 cocoons are required to make one silk sari. And to feed those silkworms requires a ton and a half of fresh mulberry leaves.

#### Wild Silk Production

*Bombyx mori* may be the dominant silkworm, but it is not the only species used in textile production. *Antherea pernyi*, *Antherea mylitta* and *Antherea yamamai* are used to make tussah or tassar silk (in China, India, and Japan, respectively); *Philosamia*



**Mother and child:** over time, all color has been lost in the 1.5-2 inch long *Bombyx mori* moth. Cultivated from pre-historic times, her 3-inch-long silkworm baby larvae today produce a phenomenal 400,000 metric tons of silk annually, each one dying in the process.



cynthia and *Philosamia ricini* are used to make eri silk. *Antherea assama* produces a golden yellow colored silk, known as muga. India is the only nation in the world that produces all three of these varieties. Collectively, these are known as wild silks, though *semi-domesticated* might be a better term. India produces over 1,500 metric tons of wild silk annually.

The main difference between wild silk and domestic silk is where the eggs are laid and cocoons are formed. Tussah and muga silk moths are allowed to breed, lay eggs, and the larva then feed on leaves in trees and form cocoons which are later removed. This eliminates the tedious feeding and management of larva in baskets indoors. In most

cases, the cocoons are then "stifled" in the same way as cocoons raised in feeding barns.

#### What Is Ahimsa Silk?

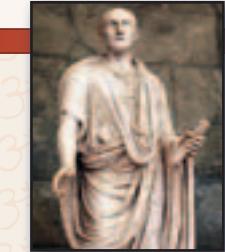
Ahimsa silk is different. To produce this silk, cocoons are collected after the moths have emerged. Most of this silk comes from the semi-domesticated silkworm species, but *Bombyx mori* can be used as well.

A number of online and brick-and-mortar stores sell finished ahimsa silk, but there are two main US outlets for this fabric: Aurora Silk ([www.aurorasilk.com](http://www.aurorasilk.com)) based in Portland, Oregon, and run by Cheryl Kolander; and Ahimsa Silk ([www.ahimsasilk.com](http://www.ahimsasilk.com)), based in Pune, India, and run by Leelavati Sabale. The latter firm is endorsed by People for Ani-

#### Timeline: 6500 bce to 2007 ce

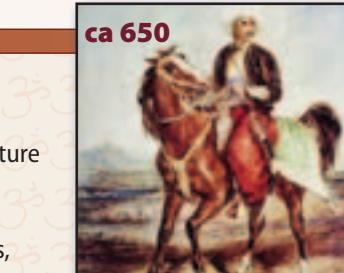
**5000-3000 bce**

Silk fabric production is established in China. It is decreed a state secret, with disclosure punishable by death.



**2000 bce**

Silk trade starts between East Asia and Western Asia



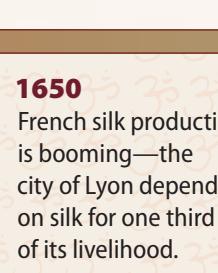
**200**

Silk Road trade is established. Sericulture spreads to Japan. Sericulture, using domestic silkworms, spreads to India.



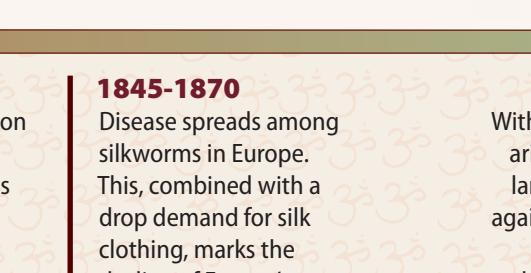
**1200**

Italy develops a large domestic silk industry as skilled weavers flee Constantinople after the Fourth Crusade. Silk production flourishes in India, from Kashmir to Mysore.



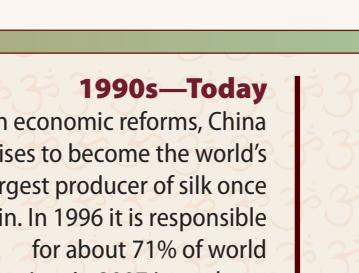
**1650**

French silk production is booming—the city of Lyon depends on silk for one third of its livelihood.



**1845-1870**

Disease spreads among silkworms in Europe. This, combined with a drop demand for silk clothing, marks the decline of Europe's silk industry.



**1990s—Today**

With economic reforms, China arises to become the world's largest producer of silk once again. In 1996 it is responsible for about 71% of world production. In 2007 it produces 300,000 tons of cocoons.

**6000 BCE**

**6,500 bce**

Silk is mentioned in the *Rig Veda*.

**2450 bce**

Wild silk is used for thread in the Indus/Saraswati civilization. Mentioned in the *Ramayana*.

**0**

**1070 bce**

Silk is traded as far as Egypt, as evidenced by a silk thread in the hair of a mummy in the Valley of the Kings.

**500**

**30 bce**

Roman trade with Asia expands. So much silk enters Rome that the Senate tries to prohibit its wearing. It was seen as a sign of decadence, plus the trade was draining Roman coffers.

**552**

Byzantine emperor Justinian obtains silkworm eggs, smuggled back from Central Asia in bamboo rods. Byzantine church begins making silk fabric.

**ca 1450-1475**

Italy's silk industry is booming, with 7,000 people employed in Florence alone. King Louis XI founds a silk industry in France.

**1600**

**British India Leads Silk Exports**



**1800**

Vicose (artificial silk) production begins in France.

**1900**

World War II brings synthetic replacements for silk into many applications. The majority of India's silk is used for parachutes.

**1945-1975**

Japan is the world's largest exporter of raw silk until 1975 when it becomes a net importer.

## Hindus Comment on the Use of Silk



**Kannan Srikanth, Hyderabad:** Though apparently there are some esoteric reasons for wearing silk, it is generally considered *ahimsa*. The Kanchi Shankaracharyas have for more than three decades deplored the use of silk, even counseling their followers to not purchase silk sarees for weddings but only cotton saris and dhotis. They especially counsel that at least the holy clothes in which the couple get married in front of the *homa* fire should be fully *ahimsa* and made of cotton, not silk.



**Dr. Nandita Shah, Mumbai:** There is absolutely no link between silk and *ahimsa*. Anyone who has seen the process by which silk is made cannot say silk does not involve a lot of violence, albeit to tiny creatures. [www.sharan-india.org](http://www.sharan-india.org)

or synthetic fibers (like people in Alaska or some other remote location), then it would be necessary to use animals. But since most of us aren't in that situation, there's no necessity for silk.

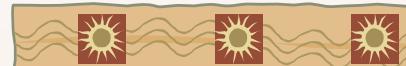
Hinduism asks us to live simply. An excessive lifestyle is what has led most people to go into debt, lose their homes to foreclosure and have troubles paying their bills. Silk is a more expensive fabric and encourages people to focus on acquiring unnecessary material possessions rather than seeking spiritual progress or living simply with a lower carbon footprint.

I would like to share with you this quote from the [PETA.org](http://PETA.org) site: "To obtain silk, distributors boil the worms alive inside their cocoons."

Anyone who has ever seen worms startle when their dark homes are uncovered must acknowledge that worms are sensitive—they produce endorphins and have a physical response to pain."

We have humane alternatives to silk—including nylon, milkweed, seed pod fibers, silk-cotton tree and ceiba tree filaments, polyester, and rayon. These are easy to find and usually less expensive than silk. Please search the web for "cruelty to insects" for details.





mal's Maneka Gandhi and proudly displays a testimonial from HH The Dalai Lama on its website.

Aurora Silk markets both *Bombyx mori*-based ahimsa silk (in fact, Kolander's partner in India has the trademark on the name "Ahimsa silk" made from *Bombyx mori* in India), as well as silks described as "peace silk" made from tussah, eri and muga cocoons. Kolander emphasizes that all her silks are produced and hand-woven by rural villagers, providing them with much-needed income.

Ahimsa Silk sells a range of fabrics for fashion and furniture, including a line of shawls, scarves and stoles. All are made from cocoons naturally discarded by emerging silk moths, who live through the process. This silk is sourced from northeast India in the case of eri and muga, while tussah is produced in central India and Uttarakhand. Ahimsa Silk emphasizes the fact that it works together with People for Animals in training villagers so they can produce this sort of silk, which commands a price premium over con-



**Insect silk—nature's most incredible fiber:** A single silk cocoon's filament can be 1000 meters long, yet is only 10-30 microns in diameter. Its special proteins are the subject of scientific study, as is spiders' web silk. *Nephila* (spider) silk has a tensile strength almost as great as steel's per unit volume and far greater than steel's per unit weight. But military biologists have failed to domesticate spiders en masse. Other experiments are underway to implant silk genes into mammals, with the hope of extracting silk proteins from milk. So far, such bizarre attempts to match natures' wonders have failed to be commercially viable.

DREAMSTIME/STUART WELBURN



ventionally produced silk.

It should be noted that ahimsa silk producers are doing their best to provide assurances that their products do not involve violence to the silk moth or larva. But there is no certification scheme to reference, as there is with organic produce, for example. So for the consumer, it is a matter of trust.

#### Questions about Ahimsa Silk

Search for "ahimsa silk" on the internet and you can't help but notice that near the top of the results is an article titled "Ahimsa (Peace) Silk: Why I Think It Doesn't Add Up" by Michael Cook, who raises silk-worms and works in silk in Texas. Cook's main problems with ahimsa silk are: First, where do you draw the line with violence? He points out that if you actually let all the female moths lay eggs, you have so many excess larvae on your hands that you can't feed them all and some end up dying.

As Cook articulated to HINDUISM TODAY, "It's a question of whether it's volitional or accidental, whether



## THE WORLD'S TOP ELEVEN SILK PRODUCERS

China - 300,000

India - 77,000

Brazil - 8,200

Iran - 6,000

Thailand - 5,000

Vietnam - 3,000

N.Korea - 1,400

Romania - 1,000

Afghanistan - 500

Japan - 500

Metric Tons of Reelable Cocoons Produced in 2007

0 50,000 100,000 150,000 200,000 250,000 300,000



Based on United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization data from 2007

mate. The females are then segregated and placed in trays to lay eggs. The males are put in a refrigerator, kept semi-frozen, and trotted out repeatedly to mate. They are eventually thrown into a dustbin to die lingering deaths when their virility diminishes."

Ultimately, Beauty Without Cruelty concludes, based on this expedition, that no silk can truly be called ahimsa silk "unless it is artificially made of yarns such as polyester."

But such a position just opens more questions about pollution caused by oil-based fabrics and the very act of farming itself. Where and by what criteria do we draw the line between violent and nonviolent action?

BY MATTHEW McDERMOTT,  
senior writer for TreeHugger.com  
and PlanetGreen.com

## IN MY OPINION

### Where Do We Draw the Line?

BY MATTHEW McDERMOTT

IT IS CLEAR THAT HUMANKIND'S TRADITIONAL LIFESTYLES ARE deeply damaging to our own future and that of all other species. We all know about issues surrounding energy, pollution, eating meat, fish, birds or wearing furs. But a new generation of fighters for nonviolence would have us "go to the edge" and protect even the insect world, as do the most orthodox of Jains. At the vanguard of the new awareness are young people, especially young women, in organizations such as Beauty Without Cruelty who want you to give up, among many things, all silk. ([www.beautywithoutcruelty.com](http://www.beautywithoutcruelty.com)).

Such a position raises a profound question about the boundaries of ahimsa. Where should one draw the line when it comes to violence, especially when the harm is unintended? When moths breed and live in the wild, do they not also die of disease, natural causes, or simply expire at the end of their life cycle, as do all living creatures? It is a well-known fact of nature that numerous off-spring of many species die well before maturity. If it happens on a farm, does that violate the law of nonviolence?

For all those who follow ahimsa strictly, conventional silk is obviously out of the question—to make that silk sari or shawl you must directly and intentionally kill thousands of insects. The silk production process may be more environmentally friendly in some ways than factory farming, especially in the case of semi-domesticated silks raised at the village level, but there is an awful lot of willful



nonviolently as possible should turn for clothing. But even here, as anyone who has farmed knows, countless insects are killed when we till the soil and apply pesticides against predators. Raising cotton requires killing cotton weevils. In the case of silk, the insects producing the product are killed; in the case of cotton the insects that feed on the product are killed. Each of us will have to make our own choice.

But one thing is clear, a new generation is realizing that everything we do has consequences. They are challenging us all to walk as gently as we can on this Earth in every choice we make.

killing going on. All of which could be avoided by using other fabrics. Ahimsa silk is a better option, assuming you've gotten the real thing from a trusted source.

But what about recommending synthetic silk as a nonviolent alternative? You need not go so far as calling all synthetic fibers and dyes poison, as Aurora Silk does, to recognize the genuinely negative environmental impact of the petro-chemical industry from where synthetic fibers originate.

Add in the effect of fossil fuels in contributing to climate change—a genuine threat to all life on the planet—and, to me at least, synthetic fibers clearly fall into the category of violence. It may be a different category of violence than directly killing an animal for food or clothing, but it is entirely avoidable nevertheless.

Which leaves us with other natural fibers: cotton, linen, hemp, jute and others, produced organically, as truly the best options. It is to these fibers that those of us wishing to live as

they are dying through neglect or dying through your action;...letting them breed and lay eggs that hatch and then starve or desiccate to death, I don't find that significantly different than killing them by choice."

His other gripe is about terminology: If you see ahimsa silk marketed as "wildcrafted," implying that the cocoons have all been gathered from the wild, that's simply not the case, Cook asserts. That may have been true twenty years ago, but not in 2009. "It's like talking about bison that roam freely on the prairies unfenced, and then implying that the bison meat you buy at Whole Foods is free range, when actually it is ranched."

This sort of terminology can get out of hand quickly: Cheryl Kolander has heard back from customers that they have seen Chinese silk being sold in New York City, claiming to be produced non-violently and even presented with counterfeit versions of Aurora Silk labels. Cook speaks of seeing tussah silk being marketed as inherently peace silk because, he paraphrases, "It's harvested from the jungles after the moths have emerged from the cocoons," when in reality those moths were raised specifically for silk. Just because a silk is not *Bombyx mori* doesn't mean it is ahimsa silk. Further discrepancies between description and reality can occur: Animal rights group Beauty Without Cruelty has publicly accused one silk producer in South India of promoting silk as ahimsa silk when the process they witnessed was just a twist on conventional silk production. Beauty Without Cruelty says they did see cocoons from which the moths were allowed to emerge, but what happened afterwards to the moths called the ahimsa description into question.

"After emerging, the male and female moths are kept together for three hours to

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Swami Durganatha Shanmuga, Administrator.





EDUCATION

# How Chinmaya Mission Trains Leaders

The two-year Vedanta course at Sandeepany Sadhanalaya in Mumbai demands rigorous personal discipline, deep devotion and intense scriptural study

*Chinmaya Mission's training program is no ordinary course of study. It is a 24/7 commitment of body, mind and soul to an immersive spiritual adventure. A recent graduate, Acharya Vivek, recounts his extraordinary experience.*

BY ACHARYA VIVEK,  
CHINMAYA MISSION  
NIAGARA, CANADA

**S**OME GREAT MEN TRY TO IMPROVE THE world by changing the outer settings of economic and societal conditions. A few greater men try to change the processes and the vision of the masses. The very greatest achieve a complete and lasting transformation, one individual at a time. That was Swami Chinmayananda's vision when he created Sandeepany Sadhanalaya in 1963. Sandeepany was the name of Lord Krishna's guru, and *sadhanalaya* means, "place of *sadhana*"—disciplined spiritual



practice. Here the acharyas (teachers) of Chinmaya Mission are trained in a two-year program which begins and ends on Ganesha Chathurti. A year later, a new course begins. I was honored to join the 13th course, which commenced in 2005.

I was born and raised in Niagara Falls, Canada, to devotees of Swami Tejomayananda, the current head of Chinmaya Mission. I pursued all that any young Canadian would: higher education, travelling, fancy possessions. Like everyone else, I followed these pursuits for the sake of happiness. And like everyone else, happiness eluded me—time and time again. This was an intensely tiring period of my life.

Relief came from a most unexpected source. I had learned that Swami Tejomayananda himself was going to be the Resident Acharya, head teacher, for the upcoming Vedanta Course. Wondering how the head of Chinmaya Mission could take so



much time away from the 300 centers and 300 acharyas around the world who constantly seek his presence, I asked myself: Will studying Vedanta from a swami in an ashram teach me to be content? Is this what I am looking for? The answer came to me: I will never know unless I try.

I was one applicant among 700. Of these, 160 were interviewed, and 70 were selected. In August of 2005, sixty of us arrived at the Mumbai ashram. We were a perfect sampling of the global diaspora: seven countries, five decades of birth dates—ages 21 to 65—and, yes, two genders, all unmarried. We were dispatched to our assigned buildings: unmarried men in Vivekalaya and unmarried women in Yashodalaya.

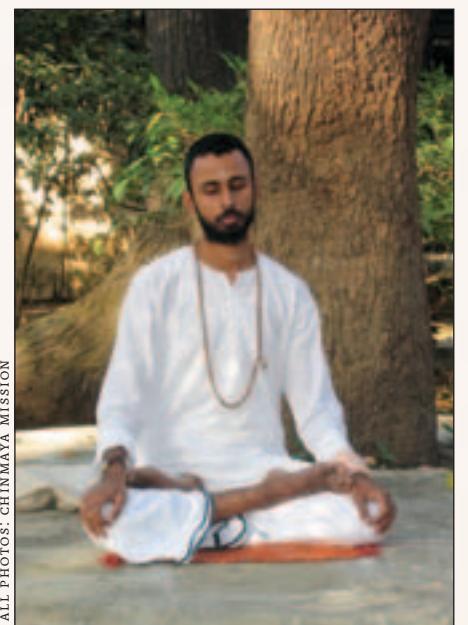
**Graduation day:** Course graduates for 2007 at Chinmaya Mission, Mumbai. Author Acharya Vivek is just behind and to the right of orange-robed Swami Nikhilananda. (top) Puja Guruji Swami Tejomayananda, head, Chinmaya Mission Worldwide.

Householders and older participants were called "guest students" and technically distinguished from the brahmacharins (unmarried seekers). In practice, however, everyone taking the course was called "brahmacharin," i.e., one pursuing Brahman. The guest students were housed in Chinmaya Vihar and treated more leniently. For example, their rooms had attached baths and air conditioning, and they could leave the ashram more freely for errands and such. On the other hand, during the course they were not called as often to speak in front of classes or the public. Being householders, they, of course, did not have the option of taking Brahmachari Diksha, the formal initiation into the path of renunciation, upon completion of the program.

My classmates' reasons for enrolling in

**Following the sages' path:** (top) Performing Ganga arati at Haridwar's Har Ki Pauri ghat, part of the student's tour of the sacred places of North India; (left above) Swami Chinmayananda with his then youthful successor, Swami Tejomayananda; (right above) Vedanta course students study outside Sarawati Nilayam for an upcoming class at Sandeepany Sadhanalaya, Mumbai.

the course were much like mine. Cauvery Bhalla of Mumbai said, "It is our common experience to get an object only to figure out that's not what we truly wanted. It is also common to come across people who know exactly what they don't want, yet are unable to point out what it is they do want. So, life goes on, endlessly chasing one object after

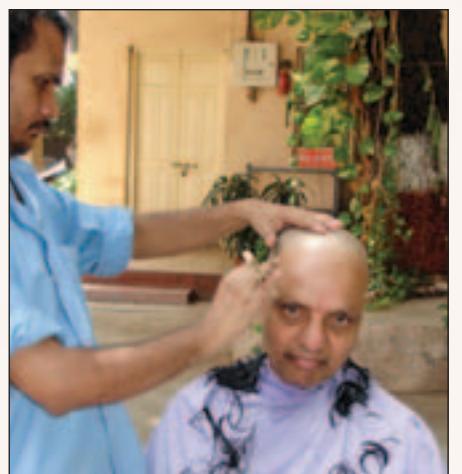


ALL PHOTOS: CHINMAYA MISSION



#### Scenes from the course: (above left)

Mohan in meditation at Sandeepany Sadhanalaya; (above right) Mumbai skyline from the ashram; (below) Acharya Raghu's head shaving



another yet feeling no satisfaction. This has been the problem of humanity since time immemorial."

Sudha Shastry of Sydney, Australia, shared a similar idea: "I desperately needed a change. I needed more meaning to my life. I decided to give Sandeepany Sadhanalaya a try. I had nothing to lose. If it did not work out, I could always go back to my job."

Atharvana Chaitanya, who had come

from Ahmedabad, India, offered his initial impression of Sandeepany: "This holy institute of Vedantic studies offers just the right environment for any seeker of knowledge to blossom into a perfect being. Everyone is given enough 'space,' within a non-judgmental atmosphere, to be able to drop all inhibitions and be what one is."

#### The Day Begins

Our first day of classes was September 7, and I was rattled. Never had I witnessed such oppressive heat and rain as Mumbai had to offer during this monsoon season. Never had I lived in a place where everyone seemed to know what they were doing, except me. Sudha, I found out, was equally lost, sighing, "I did not know what I had signed up for."

We gathered in our freshly donned white outfits for the inauguration ceremony. Swami Purushottamananda, Swami Brahmananda and the senior acharyas welcomed and blessed the class. Swami Purushottamananda declared, "It is time to forget about your dress and your address."

Ring, ring, ring, went the 4am bell—for 750 consecutive mornings. Although I had no problem with this discipline, some of us found it a hardship even after two years! Our first class of the day was Vedic chanting at 5:30 with Samvid Chaitanya. Born in Kerala, Samvidji spent many years as a wandering monk in the Himalayas, and eventually found himself at Sandeepany Sadhanalaya. We were fortunate that Swami Tejomayananda selected this young, experienced brahmachari to live with us and guide us through our challenges. "A scholar and teacher par excellence," said Shivani Khorna of Delhi, "Samvidji kept us engaged with his innovative teaching style and approachable nature."

Lacking any previous voice training, I found the Sanskrit chanting with its high pitch and low pitch quite a struggle. Vedic chanting was a *sadhana* I had never been exposed to in the West! Eventually I came to love it as a fine art.

The chanting set the mood for the next class: Vedanta philosophy. Like all classes

during the course, it was taught in English.

Having casually grown up within Chinmaya Mission, I arrogantly thought I knew what Vedanta is and who a guru was. In retrospect, I knew nothing. I joined Sandeepany to study spirituality. Yet, at the time I had no idea what was special about Vedanta versus what I learned in high school or university. Soon, though, I came to understand that every class I had ever taken, at any level of schooling, was objective science—a study of the outside world. What I was now studying in the ashram was subjective science—a study of myself. I was humbled by the realization that I knew so much about the world and so little about my body, mind and soul.

Cauvery expresses a similar experience: "Imagine walking into a city of mirrors—a city where every inch, the roads we walk on, the walls that surround us, is covered with mirror glass. Every step in that city would be an effortless discovery of a new facet of oneself. Some facets would reveal beauty, and some facets ugliness. Sandeepany Sadhanalaya is such a city of mirrors."

#### Delving into Vedanta Scriptures

Every morning at 7am and every afternoon at 4pm, guided by Swami Tejomayananda, we would plunge into the mystical language of our scriptures—breaking up our habits of limited thinking in the process. Mentally and intellectually raised to heights I had never imagined, I was ready to listen to him all day, every day. Swamiji personally taught eighty percent of our Vedanta classes over the next two years, an extraordinary commitment.

The first text we studied was Adi Shankaracharya's *Tattva Bodha*. Our journey continued with Vidyaranya Swami's *Pancha-*

*dashi*, Ramana Maharishi's *Saddarshanam*, *Mandukya Upanishad* with Gaudapada's *Karika*, and dozens more. Finally, we took up Adi Shankaracharya's *Jivanmuktananda Lahari*—the experience of an enlightened personality.

Through Swamiji's devotion to India's great saints, I was able to catch a glimpse of their greatness. This was especially true for Veda Vyasa Rishi and his *Shrimad Bhagavad Gita*. With tears in his eyes, Swamiji would bring tears to my eyes as he lovingly taught what Lord Krishna taught Prince Arjuna in the *Gita*. I am filled with reverence knowing the scripture dates back over 5,000 years, yet its message of serving and surrendering is as relevant today as ever.

When I was a youth, Swami Tejomayananda would stay at our home whenever he visited Niagara Falls. Devotees from all around used to flock by the hundreds to be in his presence. To me, the whole scene seemed boring. He was just another swami, only with a cool title—head of Chinmaya Mission. Only after I actually listened to him explain the subtlest of texts, like the *Upanishads* and *Brahma Sutras* did I come to appreciate his brilliance.

"There are only a few acharyas in the whole world who can teach what he can the way he can. Perhaps this is the reason why Swamiji was honored as 'Hindu of the Year' in 2005 by HINDUISM TODAY," remarked Prabhat Chaitanya, a student from Toronto, Canada.

#### Sanskrit, Language of the Gods

After an hour's discourse and breakfast, Sanskrit class commenced at 9:30am. When I had first mentioned to Swamiji that I was interested in joining the Vedanta Course, he laughed, and told me to learn as much



ALL PHOTOS: CHINMAYA MISSION



**Celebrating their roots:** (top to bottom) Swami Sunderananda, a direct disciple of Swami Tapovanam (guru of Swami Chinmayananda) shares his insights with the classmates during their pilgrimage to the Tapovanam's humble Himalayan hut in Uttarkashi; creating a flower rangoli decoration for Swami Tejomayananda's arrival; collecting freezing water from Gangotri, the glacial source of the sacred Ganga River





Mumbai

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Sanskrit as possible before coming to Sandeepany. Determined, I started setting aside an hour a day to learn this language of the Gods. Within a month I had to give up as I struggled to even write the script. A teacher would be necessary for me to ever learn Sanskrit. But here, thanks to Samvidji, I not only learned the alphabet, but how to read *shlokas*, write exams and interpret our scriptures. Shivani said of Samvidji, "Not only did he get us to learn Sanskrit, he also instilled a deep love for the language."

Knowing Sanskrit was a great aid in chanting the Lord's names—which was our next session. I had never been a ritual-oriented person. Rituals seemed irrational, insubstantial. Hence, when informed we were to chant Vishnusahasranama at noon every day, I had the same initial reaction as towards Sanskrit study—an inefficient use of time. But this seemingly mindless chanting eventually became quite meaningful. Swamiji took the time to explain what each of Lord Vishnu's 1,000 names signifies and how by remembering His divine qualities, one could nurture the same within oneself.

#### Practical Classes

We had periodic "organizational classes" in which we learned how to conduct the Bala Vihar children's classes and camps, how to facilitate a study group and how the Chinmaya Vidyalayas are run—all grassroots activities of the Mission. These classes were not on Vedanta, but on how to spread it. For

**From Mumbai to the Himalayas:** (left to right) Google Earth's view of Mumbai center; class with Swamiji at Tapovan Kutia; worship at the Ganga Mandir in Uttarkashi

example, Swamini Vimalananda, who looks after the education facet of Chinmaya Mission, gave us an overview of the Mission's various schools and their curriculums. Another class was on Vanaprastha Samsthana, Chinmaya Mission's retirement communities. There were no classes in management of Chinmaya Mission branches, or in personal counseling of devotees. We were expected to pick up these skills from observation of the guru and senior acharyas. As a personal devotional practice, we were taught the Paduka Puja, the daily ritual worship of the guru's sandals. This is a common form of worship among all devotees of Chinmaya Mission, one which we would later be expected to teach.

#### Evening Satsanga

After lunch, rest and our 4pm Vedanta class it was time for *arati* and evening satsanga at 6:25pm. All day my head was stretched to its limit. Tired, I welcomed this class which focused on the heart. Filled with devotional singing and the clapping hands of the public and brahmacharins, every evening was restful and memorable. The highlight of our satsangas was Swamiji's line-by-line explanation of Sant Tulsidasji's entire *Sri Ramacharitramanasa*—the first time he has ever done this in a Vedanta Course!

#### Our Days of Pilgrimage

After a year of study at Sandeepany, we set out on pilgrimage to Uttarkashi, to visit Tapovan Kutia. This was the ashram home of Swami Chinmayananda's guru, Swami Tapovan Maharaj. Our goal was to honor and pay respects to the guru parampara (lineage). No one was allowed to leave Sandeepany during the course without permission, and few wanted to. But now, everyone looked forward to this pilgrimage.

Classmate Vimal Singh of Durban, South Africa, said for us all, "Living and studying with the master, studying the ancient language of Sanskrit, the camaraderie of fellow seekers, the incessant company of saints and swamis, the celebration of a kaleidoscope of festivals, the joy of singing the Lord's name, the glory of silence, the dynamism of puja, drama, dance and music—this was all a fulfillment of some long-standing urge."

After the evening class, we took dinner and retired for the night, only to wake again at 4am—a schedule we maintained nearly every day for the two-plus years. The exceptions came for truly exceptional events—the celebration of unforgettable festivals and pilgrimage to sacred places.

Our scriptures teach us that Mahasivaratri is one of the most sattvic festivals and so one of the most important for a seeker. Words cannot describe what I experienced seeing and serving the 100,000 devotees paying homage at the Mandir. The line formed at 3am and did not clear until 3am the following day. I will forever cherish the delight I saw in the eyes of believers as they prostrated before Lord Siva.

povan Kutia. This was the ashram home of Swami Chinmayananda's guru, Swami Tapovan Maharaj. Our goal was to honor and pay respects to the guru parampara (lineage). No one was allowed to leave Sandeepany during the course without permission, and few wanted to. But now, everyone looked forward to this pilgrimage.

I was ecstatic about the adventure. En route we visited many holy places and stayed at several monasteries. Eventually we reached Tapovan Kuti, and this became home for a month. Our studies never ceased; only the context changed—heat to cold, plains to mountains. While in Uttarkashi,

we had a chance to have darshan at glorious temples like Kashi Vishwanath and Ganga Mata. Our month passed in a moment.

I had visited Tapovan Kutia with two friends in 2000. At that time it was just a cool place in the Himalayas. The experience at Tapovan Kutia during the Vedanta Course was completely different. Swami Tapovanam was a great ascetic who believed in deep *sadhana*, and at Uttarkashi we were naturally inspired to engage in deep *sadhana*. Many took up disciplines, such as maintaining silence or fasting. The atmosphere was powerful and purifying.

On our way home, we paid our respects at the ashrams of other gurus of Hinduism, including Anandamayi Ma in Haridwar, Swami Sivananda in Rishikesh and Swami Narayana in Delhi. Truly, the religious wealth of Bharat is immeasurable.

#### Challenges and Fulfillment

When I lived in a university residence, I often heard students complain about how difficult it is to live in close quarters with others. I also heard some of my married friends whine endlessly about living with their spouse. Both these situations are trying, but there is always a chance to escape—which is what we always do. We try to run away from our mind via entertainment, relationships, even work.

Living in Sandeepany was a thousand times more challenging. All that I had ever depended on was taken away: cell phone, television, restaurants, friends—I was only left with my mind. I was forced to live with the minimum; and if I could not handle this, I suffered. There was no escape from this suffering but to face it and transcend it.

Classmate Vimal had a similar experience: "Only after studying at Sandeepany did I realize that happiness is independent of outer circumstances; that it resides in my own heart. One is forced to spend time in solitude, in ruminating, in silent searching, in discovering, in fighting the uprising of negative tendencies within." For some, the experience was too much. Of the 60 of us who began, ten left before completion for a variety of reasons, including being dismissed.

#### Returning to the World

Returning to Canada, I quickly realized that nothing had changed. The people were the same, the places were the same, the things

were the same. What had changed was my vision of life and its purpose. Enlightenment was no longer a foreign concept to me; it had become the entire focus of my life. I grew closer to those who recognized and understood this change in me, and more distant from those who did not.

Now seeing the mundane world as just another form of God, interacting with it became simply one form of *sadhana*. My first assignment was serving at Chinmaya Dhara, Chinmaya Mission's center at Niagara Falls, Canada, which was wonderful. It took around eighteen months for me to earn the community's respect as a teacher. I was thankful for this period because it forced me to prove my commitment and conviction to spreading spiritual knowledge.

Sandeepany Sadhanalaya calls out to those spirits who are ready to question the feeble sense of contentment that the objects, beings and circumstances of the world have to offer. Those who heed this call are those who are ready to do what it takes to discover that contentment comes from within. They depart from Sandeepany blessed by their guru with the strength to carry themselves and others through the challenges of living.

*Chinmaya Mission, [www.chinmayamission.com](http://www.chinmayamission.com) (the international website) and [www.chinmayamission.org](http://www.chinmayamission.org) (for Chinmaya West), is currently conducting its 14th Vedanta Course. Applications for the 15th course are due in January, 2011.*



YOUTH

# Exploring the Hindu American Identity

Three award-winning essays on what it means to be a Hindu and an American today

Last summer, the Hindu American Foundation conducted its Next-Gen essay contest, soliciting original essays from youths 17-28 years old answering the questions: Why is a Hindu American identity important? How can you advocate for this identity in public policy and your private life? How can Hindu American advocacy be beneficial to our American society? Enjoy excerpts from three of the winning entries below. The originals can be read at [www.hafsite.org/nextgen](http://www.hafsite.org/nextgen).

## My Battle Within: The Identity Crisis Of a Hindu Soldier in the US Army

BY RAJIV SRINIVASAN

THE BARREL OF MY M4 ASSAULT RIFLE IS SLENDER, BLACK AND cold. The rippled plastic grips fit ergonomically to a mission driven hand, one that aggresses to protect a nation and way of life. With each trigger squeeze, a 556-caliber bullet breaches the muzzle at 2,900 feet per second with the sole purpose of taking another's life. Despite its lethality, this weapon is only a piece of metal. It is nothing without the mind and heart of the soldier perched behind it. As I don my body armor, grab my weapon and prepare to lead my platoon of 32 soldiers into Afghanistan, I hesitate. I turn to the portrait of Krishna in my office and demand of him, "What is the worth of this fight? Is it worth our limbs, our lives or the heartbreak of our parents? What cause is so important as to merit the coming violence?" And so begins my war within: the quest for an identity.

Like most Indian youth in the US, I faced the inner conflict between my Indian and American identities. At home, I watched Bollywood movies and prayed to Hindu Deities; but at school, I spoke English, played football and did whatever I could to emulate a typical American childhood. I felt pulled in two directions: one identity abandoning my Indian heritage, the other neglecting my American way of life. Thus, I went through my most formative years without knowing who I was, nor what I stood for.

As high school came to an end, I hastily made the decision to attend the US Military Academy at West Point, but did so in vain. At the time, I was not sure about being an Army officer. I was just looking for a shining star for my résumé. I was looking for a way to pay for college. Perhaps on a deeper level, I was looking for a sense of belonging.



**Patriotic:** Lieutenant Srinivasan with US Secretary of Defense Robert Gates during his graduation from West Point Military Academy

I wanted an identity to which everyone in my immediate surroundings could relate and respect.

The US Army is a rare home for an Indian immigrant, but no other endeavor has ever given me the professional and spiritual fulfillment than the experience of military service. The Army challenged my most extreme patriotic influences against my peaceful Hindu beliefs. How could I serve patriotically as a US Army Officer, owning the responsibility of waging war against our national enemies, but remain a man of the Hindu faith believing in the peaceful coexistence of all beings? This was a deep philosophical confrontation, but I accepted it with resolve.

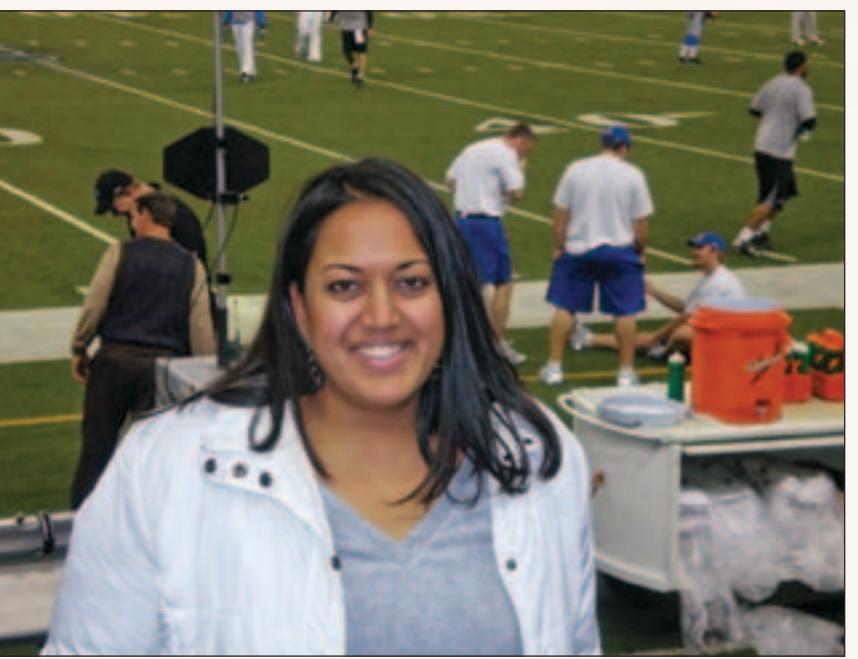
Through days of wet, cold, hot, humid, tired and hungry, I maintained a vegetarian diet. After a long day of military training, I returned to my barracks to indulge myself in the poetry of the *Bhagavad Gita*. I found solace in Arjuna's struggle as a shamed warrior fighting against his blood. I found strength in Krishna's assertion of conviction and discipline. I found that, though typical Hindus and soldiers lead vastly different lives, both share a common purpose: to serve a higher calling for good. Thus, there was no need for a struggle between my American and Hindu identities; rather, finding strength in one made me stronger in the other.

My Hindu American identity is now a defining part of my life. As Arjuna beckons of his charioteer, "How can I wage war against my family? I would rather surrender, than commit such atrocities," Krishna affirms that it is our duty as Hindus to do what we believe is right, regardless of the opposition. When peaceful attempts to reconcile fail, we must be prepared to defend the values in which we so wholeheartedly believe. It is this reasoning that convinces Arjuna to fight to protect his kingdom. It is this reasoning that Gandhi used when supporting the British Army's aggression against the Nazis in World War II. This reasoning is why I feel so compelled to defend this nation, that has given my family countless gifts, against

those who wish to do it unnecessary harm. I do not fight in spite of my religion. I fight inspired by it.

The importance of the Hindu American identity extends beyond a vague resolve to fight for what you believe in. Each of us is faced daily with moral challenges in this country, and our reactions to them define our spiritual resolve. This nation is in an ethical crisis, from the poorest of American ghettos through the wealthiest of corporate banks. Hindu Americans are a dominant source of influence, wealth and intellect in this nation, so what does it say of our personal constitutions if we tolerate the ethical degradation around us? We have the means to drastically improve the ethical standards in this country. We owe it to ourselves as Hindu Americans to defend, as Arjuna does his kingdom, the moral foundations which have made this country a haven for religious and ethnic tolerance. We could collectively sit on the sidelines and criticize our leadership as many Americans do. But if we aspire to follow Krishna's guidance, it is our duty to proactively defend the integrity that upholds our great society. This is the new importance, the calling, of the Hindu American identity: inspired by our faith, we must actively rebuild our nation's character and preserve it for our posterity. So I ask of each Hindu American, what have you done to make America stronger for our children?

**RAJIV SRIRAM SRINIVASAN**, 23, is a Lieutenant in the United States Army serving as a Platoon Leader for Attack Company, 2-1 Infantry out of Ft. Lewis, Washington. He was born in Chennai and raised in Roanoke, Virginia, by his parents Gita and Rajagopalan. Rajiv is the founder of the nonprofit Beyond Orders ([www.beyondorders.org](http://www.beyondorders.org)), a website that connects soldiers in war zones with NGOs in the US to meet the humanitarian needs of the Iraqi and Afghani people. Rajiv remains a devout Hindu and a vegetarian. E-mail: [believeinrajiv@gmail.com](mailto:believeinrajiv@gmail.com)



**When in the US:** Purnita cheering on her university football team

the Minneapolis/St. Paul area, I naturally made friends with peers with very different cultural and religious upbringings from my own. I recall feeling left out when my friends went to church camp each summer and when a large percentage of my classmates showed up to school with bracelets proclaiming their faith. I saw that my faith didn't have such large-scale organized events or gimmicks to latch onto. My family follows Hinduism, which is the world's oldest and the third most practiced religion. However, as a native English speaker, it was not very easy for me to practice the religion, due to language barriers. I was taught the basic beliefs, but never fully made the teachings a part of my daily life as I imagine I would have if I had been raised in India.

As an adult, I've begun to realize the importance of learning more about the Hindu faith and maintaining it as a part of my way of life. As a Hindu American, I've been exposed to other religions throughout my education, most notably Christianity and Judaism. In America, Hinduism has always seemed to blend into the background, willing to succumb to the religions that are more common in society. But recently, Indian actors have become household names through popular films such as "Bend it Like Beckham" and "Slumdog Millionaire." This fame has brought India, and its major religion, out of the background and into the spotlight.

With its renewed fame, I have been given an opportunity as a Hindu American to share the teachings of Hinduism with others and to clear up misunderstandings of the religion. It is so important to maintain my identity as a Hindu American, because I am a part of the generation that is starting to make major decisions about the future of our country. It would be a shame to watch the identity that my parents and so many others worked so hard to foster, halfway across the world from their motherland, disappear.

**PURNITA HOWLADER**, 27, is of Bangladeshi descent. She was born in Urbana, Illinois, and lived in Minnesota, Italy and England before spending the majority of her childhood in Woodbury, Minnesota. She received a Bachelor's Degree in Business in 2003 from the University of Minnesota, Minneapolis/St. Paul, then spent five years working in the field of Human Resources. Purnita is currently attending law school at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. E-mail: [purnita.howlader@gmail.com](mailto:purnita.howlader@gmail.com)

## The Hindu American Identity: A Melting Pot within a Melting Pot

BY PURNITA HOWLADER

**S**UPERMAN, WONDER WOMAN, SPIDERMAN AND ME. WHAT DO these four people have in common? While I may not fit the mold of these characters, we all have a major commonality. I feel that I've been leading somewhat of a double life for a long time, and it has not been until recently that I've come to accept as well as try to fuse my two worlds together. My "double life" stems from being an ABCD, or "American Born Confused Desi." This is a term that refers to people of South Asian descent who were born and live in the United States. The confusion is regarding identity: as an ABCD, I am constantly battling between two cultures, the culture of my parents and that of the society in which I have been raised. Not only are ABCDs confused about their identities, so also are FOBS, or "Fresh Off the Boat" Hindu immigrants to America.

Between these two groups, there is a lot of disparity as to what a Hindu American identity is or what it should be. America is known as a melting pot of cultures, ideas and languages. The Hindu American identity is itself a melting pot, as there are so many variations of the religion and of the people who practice it.

As an ABCD growing up in a predominantly Caucasian suburb of



## Land of the Free, Home of the Veda: The Hindu American Identity & Cultural Synthesis

BY SHIVI CHANDRA

**A** NONRESIDENT INDIAN WHO CONSIDERS HERSELF A HINDU American will hear a variety of reactions over the course of her life, mostly relating to how nice it is that she chooses to "stay in touch with her heritage," "remember her culture," "take pride in her roots" and other such platitudes. As a result, the majority of nonresident Indians believe that their role as Hindu Americans is mainly a preservative one, and if they manage to emulate exactly the social mores of homeland Indian Hinduism, they have succeeded in their task.

I believe that the importance of being Hindu American is a great deal more than simply preservation. As citizens of a dual heritage, molded as much by Christmas as by Diwali, we would not do our identity justice if we did not add something original of our own to the state of flux that is the Hindu cultural canon. I believe that Hindu Americans have something of this sort—something extraordinary, something formed by our unique experience—to contribute to the world at large, and this is why my Hindu American identity is important to me.

This extraordinary thing is that being Hindu American represents access to both the secular and the religious facets of man's most ancient attempt to make sense of the world. In the Hindu religious tradition, this is clearly visible in the *Vedas*, largely discursive texts which use dialectic, reasoning, mathematics and advanced science to find order in the bewildering metaphysical tapestry of the universe. For ancient Hindu scholars such as Shankaracharya, the implications of this took form in a religious impulse to strive for the highest, the greatest, the most excellent form of man possible to our conception, and the rest of Hindu religious thought has slowly woven a cocoon of rituals, social structures and sectarian belief systems around this central impulse. But the core of the philosophy always remained the same: that man is a great and powerful being, that because of the Godstuff of which his soul is fashioned he may triumph in any situation, that there is a purpose to life and that it is a beautiful and meaningful purpose.

In secular life, I believe this philosophical premise has found a true home in the United States of America. Here, the quest for egalitarianism, justice and opportunity for excellence in human life is honored more than in any place on Earth, and to experience the ancient Hindu philosophy of *vasudhaiva kutumbakam*, "the world as one family," I need look no further than my own neighborhood, to the faces of the many immigrants who have found a home in American society.

Both Hindu philosophy and American secular wisdom speak to the core of man, and therefore I have always felt that these belief systems are uniquely compatible. The only difference is that the American philosophical tradition points to the Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights; the Hindu tradition to the *Gita* and the *Rig Veda*, but the theme of each is one: the triumph of the human spirit. One says it in a religious way, with rituals, poetry and



faith, and the other with proofs, justifications and extensions that are far removed from their origins in the Judeo-Christian social ethos. This, to me, is the importance of being Hindu American: recognizing that I am in a position to reconcile faith and intellect, spirituality and science, passion and reason, as the two streams of my heritage have the capacity to do and have been doing for years.

Without realizing that the purest impulse of religion and the purest impulse of secular life is the same, I believe that society everywhere stands at the brink of emotional collapse. Creating a rigid line between religion and the rest of life has proved insanely impractical in the modern world. Regimes which consider themselves purely religious have turned into totalitarian empires of penury and subjugation, whereas self-proclaimed secular nations suffer an emptiness of the spirit derived from a contemplative vacuum, emotional isolation, and lack of spiritual dialogue. Religious and secular groups everywhere in the world have difficulty understanding and working with one another in any truly effective way, even though their mission is largely the same. If religion and secularism could be reconciled, these problems could be easily averted. And this is the benefit society will reap from Hindu American advocacy.

Hindu Americans must advocate for their heritage because our religion stands at a unique juncture between pure religion and pure secularism. The ancient rishis, after all, were experts at reconciling the secular and the religious. Aryabhata was a philosopher, but also a mathematician. Ved-Vyas and Narada were wandering ascetics, but also superlative politicians. Dronacharya was a spiritual teacher, but also a weapons master. All of these people knew that the material and the spiritual are welded together in the ultimate productive life, and so they strove for excellence in all fields. They were ideal Hindus—but they would also not have been out of place among Jefferson or Hancock. The great men of both traditions taught a truly holistic, integrated lifestyle. And the greatest form of advocacy a Hindu American can perform is to live such a lifestyle herself—a life in which religion and secularism are not mutually exclusive, but form

a synergy that is truly the hallmark of the *purusharthy*, the Hindu concept of the ideal man. If we can recognize and expound upon the astonishing similarities between Hinduness and Americanness, which people normally insist on compartmentalizing into religion and secularism, we will succeed in bridging an ancient and actually meaningless divide between East and West. This is a benefit not only for American society, but for all of mankind.

For me, this is truly the greatest advocacy possible: synthesis, not simply tolerance. I will learn and explore my binary heritage, synthesize its elements of rationality and excellence, and create an informed definition of what my religion and my culture mean to me. I will go out and live the life it mandates, show the world what a *purusharthy* looks like, and when I am asked how I was able to do it, I will say it was because I am a Hindu American.

SHIVI CHANDRA, 20, was born in India, grew up in Michigan and is now an undergraduate studying international relations at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland. She hopes to pursue a career as a sociological field researcher, and her research interests include trends in contemporary Indian culture and philosophy. She is particularly interested in the applications of Vedanta in the nonprofit sector. E-mail: [schand11@jhu.edu](mailto:schand11@jhu.edu)



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# Hindu Heritage Endowment

## AN ESTATE PLANNING TOOLKIT TO BENEFIT YOU, IRAIAN TEMPLE & OTHER WORTHY CAUSES

If your estate plan is out of date or nonexistent, the Hindu Heritage Endowment (HHE) wants to help. "We're happy to send our complimentary estate planning toolkit to anyone on request," says Shanmuganathaswami, Charitable Funds Manager for HHE. Phil Murphy, Estate Planning Advisor for HHE, adds, "We want supporters and their families to avoid the unnecessary legal fees, taxes, family dissension and delay that result from dying intestate (without a will). It can be costly to your family and leaves you no say over who gets your assets."

Though it is not a substitute for legal advice, the kit does prepare people to meet with an attorney, he said. "It also addresses important nonlegal questions regarding final ceremonies, obituary preparation and the whereabouts of legal documents, such as insurance policies and wills." When asked who should order the toolkit, he offered, "Anyone who reads this article. Facing our mortality is a subject we usually avoid. Our estate planning toolkit can help anyone come up with a plan they are happy with."

There are more than legal issues at stake, Phil adds. "The Hindu faith is family centered. Uncertainty about the disposition of a parent's assets can create severe tension among children while parents are alive and conflict among them if parents die with no plan or a flawed plan." He cites four common estate-planning errors and shortcomings:

1. Having no written will, living trust, or plan to avoid conservatorship.
2. Vagueness regarding the distribution of personal property, such as art, books, jewelry and furnishings, that may have both sentimental and monetary value.
3. Conflicting instructions, especially in second marriages, where a parent wants property to pass to a child but holds it in joint tenancy with a spouse.
4. Outdated or incorrect beneficiary designations on financial and brokerage accounts.

Phil also encourages supporters to get instant estate planning information from the planned giving section of HHE's website. "Visitors can review the basics of wills, revocable living trusts, powers of attorney and health-care wishes." The website also provides a glossary of commonly used planned giving and estate planning terms. "Good causes like HHE benefit when their supporters have estate plans," Phil observes. "For example, only six percent of US citizens leave cash gifts to charity at death. That's probably because so many have no written plans."

To learn more about setting up your own estate and life income plan to provide immediate tax and income benefits to you and your family, while also providing a future gift to the temple or another HHE cause, please visit [www.hheonline.org](http://www.hheonline.org). For an estate planning toolkit write to [hhe@hindu.org](mailto:hhe@hindu.org).



*An elderly couple compose a will that assigns their assets to family and to their favorite charity, in their case the Iraivan Temple Endowment in Hawaii. They could also give to an orphanage, an ashram or dozens of other good causes.*

## JULY TO SEPTEMBER ENDOWMENT CONTRIBUTIONS

<b>Kauai Aadheenam Monastic Endowment</b>	<b>Kauai Aadheenam Matavasi Medical Fund</b>	<b>Mrunal Patel</b>	<b>Yogaswami Hindu Boys' Home Fund</b>
Gunasekaran Kandasamy 166.25	Shyamadeva Dandapani 63.00	Shanta Devi Periasamy 874.57	Vinaya Alahan 50.00
Diksha Katir 44.95	Nalini Ganapati 50.50	Brett Phillips 10.00	Murali Balaji 1.13
Ripla & Gaurav Malhotra 125.00	Gowri Nadason 151.20	Anonymous 154.00	Kugendra Canaganayagam 60.00
Roy Oshita 500.00	Vayudeva Varadan 72.00	Anonymous 501.00	Anonymous 612.00
K. Lakshmi Kantha Reddy 35.00	Other Donations 4,800.00	Alex Ruberto 60.00	Murali Krishnaswamy 75.00
Darma & Shivali Satgunasingam 75.00	Total 5,136.70	Aran Sambandar 36.00	Natraj Narayanswami 12.50
Niraj Thaker 75.50		Nigel Subramanian Siva 1,000.00	Patrick Parr 50.00
Other Donations 47,326.52		Kannan Srikanth 2,628.16	Ananthakumar Renganathan 100.00
Total 48,349.22		Vayudeva Varadan 84.00	Total 960.63
		Total 12,392.58	
<b>Kumbhalavalai Ganesha Temple Endowment</b>	<b>Kumbhalavalai Ganesha Temple Endowment</b>	<b>Udayan Care Endowment Fund</b>	<b>India Hindu Tribals Endowment</b>
Manoharan Navaratnarajah 75.00	Manoharan Navaratnarajah 75.00	Devdatta Mhaikar 25.00	Murali Balaji 1.14
			Niraj Thaker 15.00
			Total 16.14
<b>Iraivan Temple Endowment</b>	<b>Iraivan Temple Endowment</b>	<b>Savite Hindu Scriptural Fund for the Visually Impaired</b>	<b>Murugan Temple of North America Puja Fund</b>
Roger & Rosemary Brown 200.00	Roger & Rosemary Brown 200.00	Alex Ruberto 70.00	Vayudeva Varadan 72.00
Donald Buente 50.00	Donald Buente 50.00		
Nalini Ganapati 50.50	Nalini Ganapati 50.50		
C. Govind 305.28	C. Govind 305.28		
Victoria Lynne Johnson 51.00	Victoria Lynne Johnson 51.00		
Latha Kannan 153.00	Latha Kannan 153.00		
Diksha Katir 129.70	Diksha Katir 129.70		
Murali Krishnaswamy 250.00	Murali Krishnaswamy 250.00		
Madhurendu & Sharda Kumar 101.00	Madhurendu & Sharda Kumar 101.00		
Silvarajoo Muniandy 89.80	Silvarajoo Muniandy 89.80		
Niranjan Sankaranarayanan 100.00	Niranjan Sankaranarayanan 100.00		
Lucy Souter 10.00	Lucy Souter 10.00		
Niraj Thaker 76.50	Niraj Thaker 76.50		
Anonymous 126.00	Anonymous 126.00		
Other Donations 53,604.36	Other Donations 53,604.36		
Total 55,297.14	Total 55,297.14		
<b>Hindu Orphanage Endowment Fund</b>	<b>Hindu Orphanage Endowment Fund</b>	<b>Murugan Temple Valpanam Festival Fund</b>	<b>Rani Jothiswarar Memorial Fund</b>
Murali Balaji 1.14	Murali Balaji 1.14	Pathmini Saravanapavan 108.00	Thiruchelvi Arumugam 10.00
Charles Hayes 1,000.00	Charles Hayes 1,000.00	Gunasekaran Kandasamy 166.25	K. Balaraman Family 39.93
Murali Krishnaswamy 166.25	Murali Krishnaswamy 166.25	Natraj Narayanswami 21.00	Shamala Jeganathan 10.00
Alex Ruberto 100.00	Alex Ruberto 100.00	Lucy Souter 10.00	Kodisvara Jothiswarar 50.00
Lucy Souter 30.00	Lucy Souter 30.00	Rodney & Ilene Standen 30.00	Selvanathan Jothiswarar 20.00
Himanshu Vyas 54.00	Himanshu Vyas 54.00	Bala Sivaceyon 44.86	Siva Jothiswary 50.00
Total 1,382.39	Total 1,382.39	Kapaleeshwara Temple Orphanage 250.00	Pusparani 20.00
		Murali Krishnaswamy 250.00	Total 199.93
<b>Hindu Education Endowment</b>	<b>Hindu Education Endowment</b>	<b>Pazhassi Balamandiram Orphanage Fund</b>	<b>Ramanathaswamy Temple Cleaning Fund</b>
Murali Balaji 1.14	Murali Balaji 1.14	Chiranjevi Raparla 40.00	Vinaya Alahan 50.00
		Michael Zimmermann 5.00	Danye Crotti 100.00
		Total 335.00	Hiranya Gowda 99.00
<b>Hindu Press International Endowment Fund</b>	<b>Hindu Press International Endowment Fund</b>	<b>Hindu Literature Fund</b>	<b>Manogaran Mardemootoo</b>
Hiranya Gowda 63.00	Hiranya Gowda 63.00	Murali Balaji 1.13	133.56
Himanshu Vyas 54.00	Himanshu Vyas 54.00	Ganga Sivanathan 300.00	Anonymous 153.00
Total 117.00	Total 117.00	Lucy Souter 40.00	Lucy Souter 40.00
		Kannan Srikanth 500.50	Kannan Srikanth 500.50
<b>Loving Ganesha Distribution Fund</b>	<b>Loving Ganesha Distribution Fund</b>	<b>Niraj Thaker 33.00</b>	<b>Niraj Thaker 33.00</b>
Tina Desai 36.00	Tina Desai 36.00	Total 1,409.06	
Diksha Katir 89.80	Diksha Katir 89.80		
Manoharan Navaratnarajah 75.00	Manoharan Navaratnarajah 75.00		
Gassa Patten 1,350.00	Gassa Patten 1,350.00		
Total 1,550.80	Total 1,550.80		
<b>Saiva Agamas Trust</b>	<b>Saiva Agamas Trust</b>	<b>Hinduism Today Complimentary Subscription Fund</b>	<b>Hindu American Foundation Endowment</b>
Praful & Ranjan Patel 101.00	Praful & Ranjan Patel 101.00	Hiranya Gowda 153.00	Murali Balaji 1.14
Ganga Sivanathan 210.00	Ganga Sivanathan 210.00	Rajagopal Krishnan 60.00	Subramanian Pennathur 101.00
Total 311.00	Total 311.00	Devdatta Mhaikar 25.00	Niraj Thaker 33.00
		Michael Zimmermann 5.00	Michael Zimmermann 5.00
		Total 243.00	Total 140.14
<b>Hinduism Today Lifetime Subscription Fund</b>	<b>Hinduism Today Lifetime Subscription Fund</b>	<b>Himalayan Academy Book Distribution Fund</b>	<b>The Endowment for Global Hindu Rights</b>
Yatrika Ajaya 74.05	Yatrika Ajaya 74.05	Shyamadeva Dandapani 63.00	Murali Balaji 1.14
Arvind Chandrakantan 800.00	Arvind Chandrakantan 800.00	Kauai Aadheenam Yagam Fund 17.00	K.K. Parekh 15.00
Maria S. Dara 160.00	Maria S. Dara 160.00	Victoria Lynne Johnson 17.00	Total 16.14
Prabin Gautam 240.00	Prabin Gautam 240.00	<b>Yogaswami Hindu Girls' Home of Sittandy Endowment</b>	
Meena Kakarala 800.00	Meena Kakarala 800.00	Vinaya Alahan 55.00	
Bharati Patil 160.00	Bharati Patil 160.00	Jeri Arin 500.00	
Niroshree Peruman 25.06	Niroshree Peruman 25.06	Murali Balaji 1.13	
Apputhury Praisoody 80.00	Apputhury Praisoody 80.00	Marlene Carter 162.00	
Lakshmi Puvanendran 1,001.00	Lakshmi Puvanendran 1,001.00	Anonymous 763.20	
Amodaa Sagum 89.84	Amodaa Sagum 89.84	Tina Desai 300.00	
Jayasutha Samuthiran 16.08	Jayasutha Samuthiran 16.08	Marion Karimjooy Borhani 200.00	
Anupkumar Shetty 160.00	Anupkumar Shetty 160.00	Joel Knepp 150.30	
Nutanatha Sivaceyon 14.03	Nutanatha Sivaceyon 14.03	Murali Krishnaswamy 75.00	
Uma Sivanathan 156.00	Uma Sivanathan 156.00	Devdatta Mhaikar 6.00	
Girish Skanda 112.00	Girish Skanda 112.00	Natraj Narayanswami 12.50	
Siven Veerasamy 9.89	Siven Veerasamy 9.89	Patrick Parr 50.00	
Sharad Wagle 160.00	Sharad Wagle 160.00	Subramanian Pennathur 80.01	
Gary & Radica Asha Yee-Fong 800.00	Gary & Radica Asha Yee-Fong 800.00	Anonymous 45.00	
Total 4,857.95	Total 4,857.95	Ananthakumar Renganathan 30.00	
		Puvaneswary Roberts 90.00	
<b>Hindu Businessmen's Association Trust</b>	<b>Hindu Businessmen's Association Trust</b>	Ganga Sivanathan 150.00	
Paramaseevelan Canagasaby 6.59	Paramaseevelan Canagasaby 6.59	Anonymous 45.00	
Vel Mahalingam 20.12	Vel Mahalingam 20.12	Soma Sundaram 30.00	
Manogaran Mardemootoo 33.39	Manogaran Mardemootoo 33.39	Niraj Thaker 107.00	
Total 60.10	Total 60.10	Total 2,852.14	
<b>Boys School for Iraivan Priesthood</b>	<b>Boys School for Iraivan Priesthood</b>	<b>Siva Poomi School Trust</b>	<b>Grand Total</b>
David Bohn 10.00	David Bohn 10.00	Murali Balaji 1.13	us\$8,075,000.00
Bala Sivaceyon 36.72	Bala Sivaceyon 36.72		
Total 46.72	Total 46.72		

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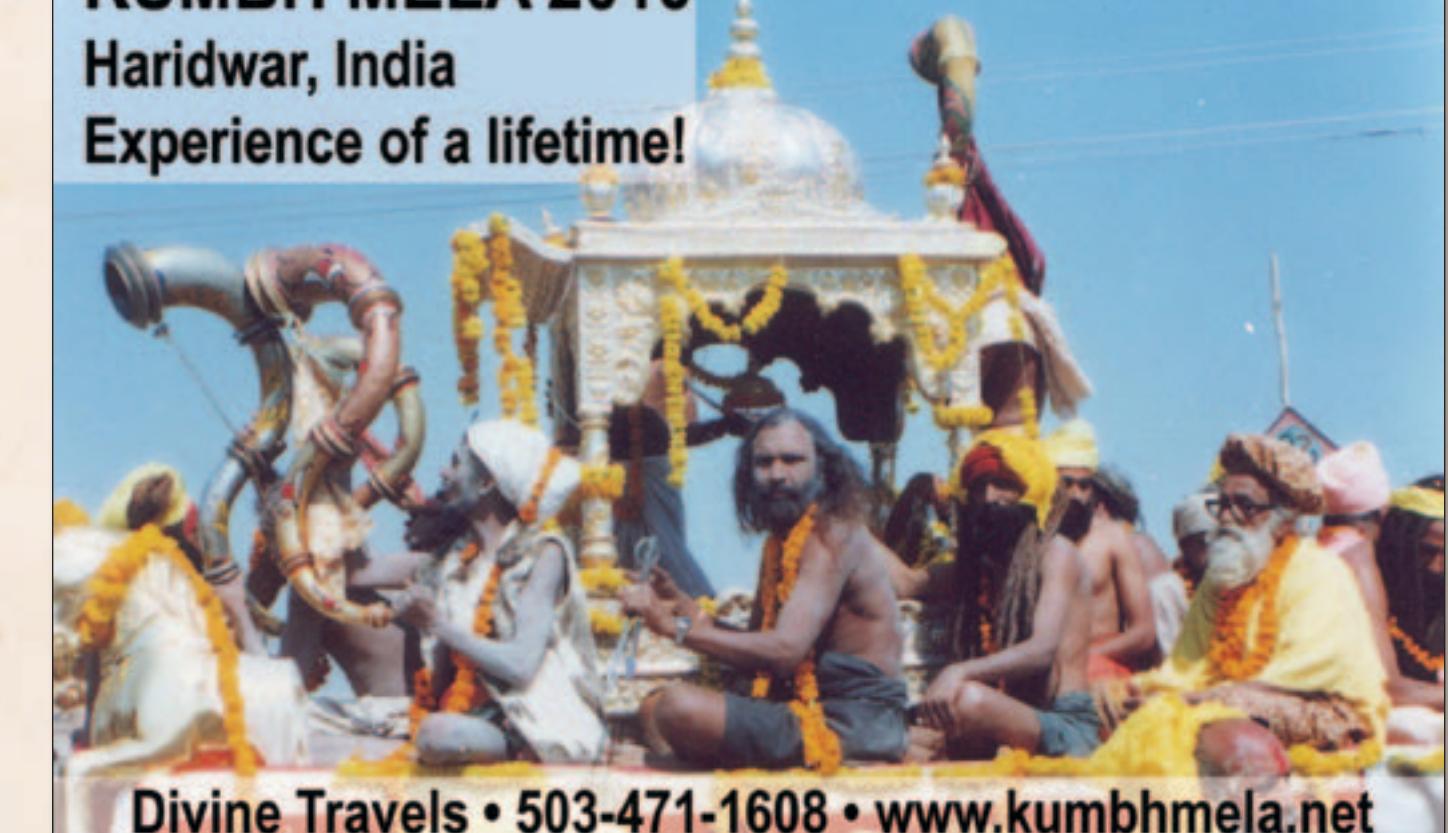


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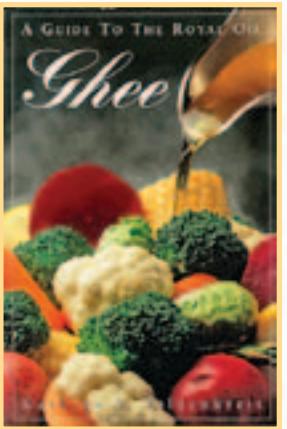


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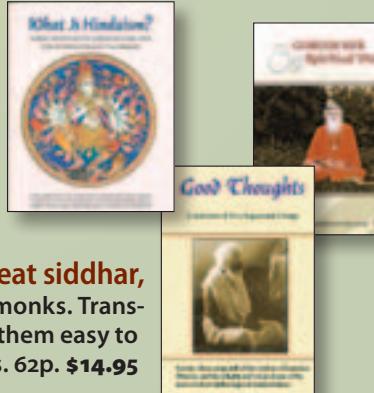
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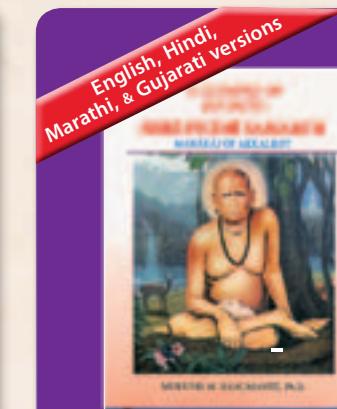
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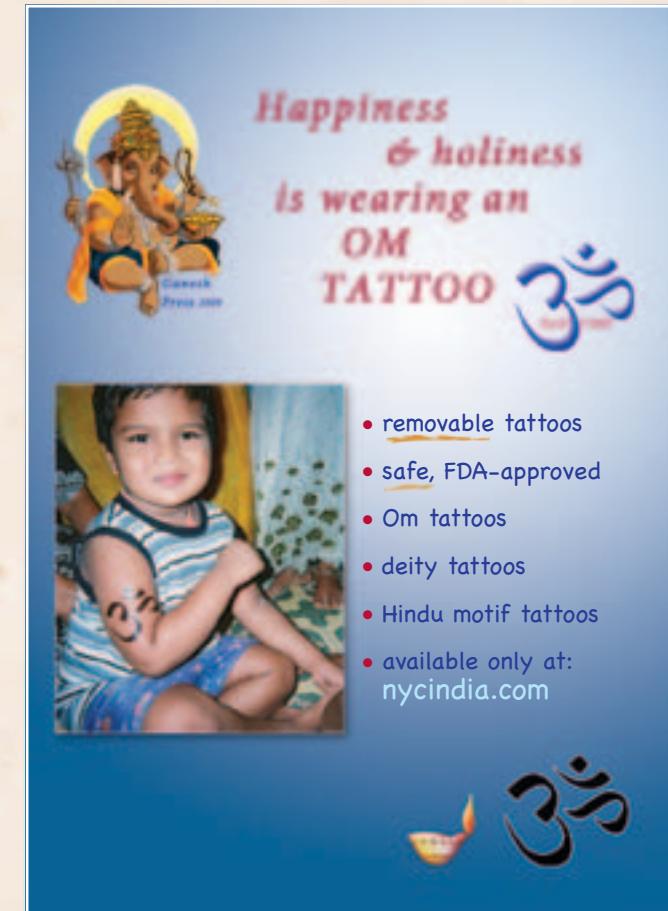


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Children come to live in AIM's Study-Homes (live-in schools). All their expenses are covered.

#### Impressive results to date

In 9 short years, AIM has already brought medical, educational, nutritional and infrastructure assistance to an amazing 2.5 million villagers of remote India. Accomplishments so far include:

- 78 quality live-in schools
- 5 hospitals
- 100 nursery schools
- 6 mobile clinics
- 200+ tuition centers
- women's self-help group
- counseling services
- eye / dental camps

#### The mission goes on— There is a lot more to be done!

AIM's mission is to make sure every child in India's remote areas has access to nutritious food, education and health care—and soon! Among other projects, it intends to establish at least one live-in school in each of India's 635 districts by 2025.

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- a live-in school (ave. 50 children) for a year, \$18,250

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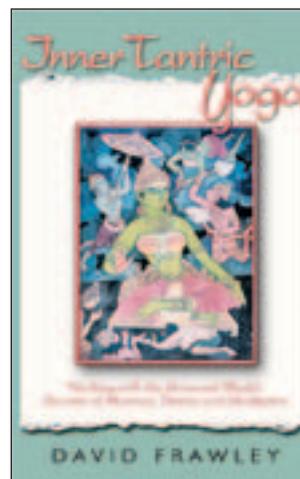
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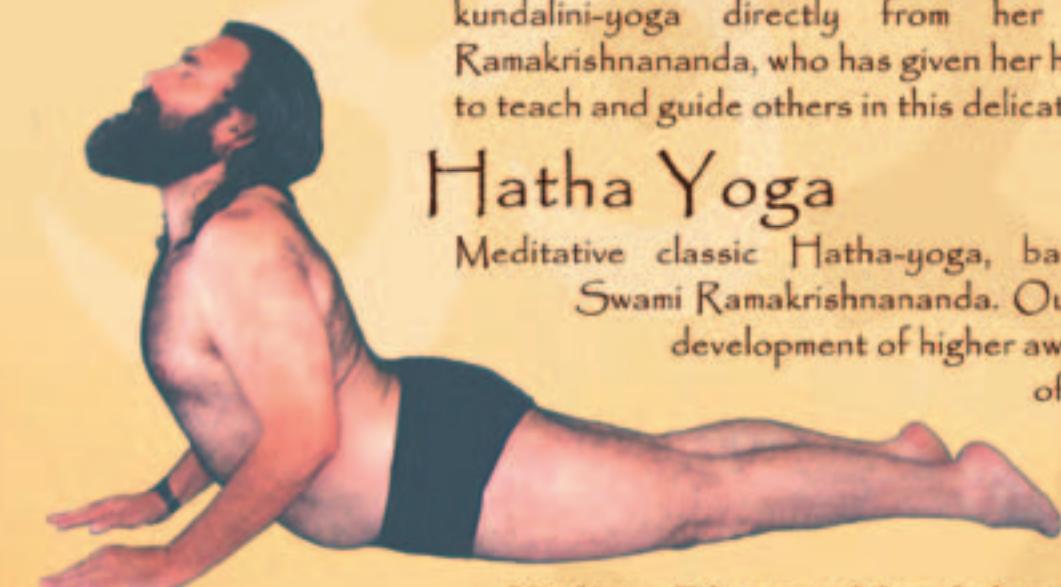
Swami Ramananda, who guides the meditation, studied kundalini-yoga directly from her spiritual master, Swami Ramakrishnananda, who has given her his blessing and authorization to teach and guide others in this delicate wisdom. Tuesday at 8:45 pm

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DIGITAL BOOKS

## A Huge Revolution Is Taking Print from Paper to Cyberspace

BY MADHURI SHEKAR, LOS ANGELES

WHEN TRAVELING ON THE BUS OR TRAIN these days, you might have noticed fewer people reading unwieldy newspapers or magazines. Instead you see commuters engrossed in sleek and portable e-reading devices—a Kindle, a Sony Reader, their iPhone or a netbook that fits on one hand.

### Hundreds of Books in One Gadget

On June 10, 2009, Amazon released Kindle DX, the third version of their popular e-reading device. Soon after, on August 5, Sony announced two new editions of the Sony Reader. Other highly anticipated devices include Plastic Logic, a letter-sized touch-screen reader and a dual-screen e-reader by ASUS, perhaps the cheapest e-reading device yet.

Some users prefer a small device with a complete operating system that can run everything from MS Word to their personal management calendar. For them there is a plethora of new netbooks being released it seems almost weekly. Today's units are fast enough to run games and play hi-resolution video. Meanwhile everyone is holding their breath to see if the as-yet-unreleased, sure-to-be-fabulous-but-expensive Apple tablet, will eclipse them all.

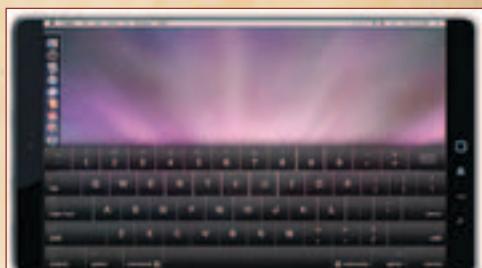
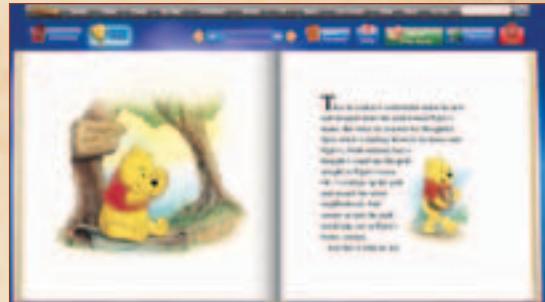
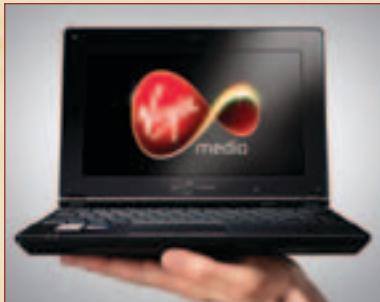
Whatever the device, one thing is clear: the era of the 10-pound book and the home library of a thousand volumes is waning. These devices can contain thousands of e-books, instantly available at your fingertips.

### Major Players Battle for Market Share

Not since the time of Guttenberg has there been such a marked change in how we consume and share knowledge. It is a radical revolution in the way we experience the written word. E-books were once specialized products delivered on DVDs. But the internet has changed the game, and major players lead the way from print into cyberspace at a mind-boggling pace.

Google has ramped up its ambitious and controversial project to digitize millions of books to create the world's first comprehensive e-library. [Scribd.com](http://Scribd.com), the "YouTube of

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documents," houses over 10 million books, documents, reports, and other text-based files in its vast online warehouse. While Amazon and Sony are not disclosing the number of e-readers sold, industry estimates range from 500,000 Kindles for 2008, to 400,000 Sony Readers as of January 2009. Interestingly, Dan Brown's new hit bestseller "The Lost Symbol" sold better in its Kindle version than as a hardcover book in the first week of its release in September 2009. Disney has also jumped into the fray by unveiling a new subscription-based e-book web site, [www.DisneyDigitalBook.com](http://www.DisneyDigitalBook.com). Government-run educational institutions are also jumping on board. In May 2009, Gov. Schwarzenegger of California announced his "Free Digital Textbook Initiative," aiming to have digital textbooks used in California public schools by the fall of 2009.

Blogs such as [HinduEBooks.blogspot.com](http://HinduEBooks.blogspot.com) keep track of the latest Hindu publications online, while [HinduEBooks.wordpress.com](http://HinduEBooks.wordpress.com) makes note of Hindu scriptures in PDF format, in their original Sanskrit using Devanagari script. Hindu educators, leaders and

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